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MUHAMMADD MARMADUKE WILLIAM PICKTHALL

THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

CHAPTER I

"Woe on you, mothers of nothing! May the scourge of Allah flay you as you go!"

The mother of Iskender held the doorway of her little house in a posture of spitting defiance. Rancour, deep-rooted and boundless, ranged in her guttural snarl. Her black eyes burned to kill, their thick brows quite united by the energy of her frown as she gazed across a sand-dell, chary of vegetation but profuse in potsherds, towards the white walls and high red roof of the Mission-house seen above a wave of tamarisks on the opposite dune. The hedge of prickly pear defining her small domain did not obstruct the view, for it consisted largely of gaps, by one of which a group of three Frankish ladies had just gone from her. She could see their white-clad forms, under sunshades, down there in the hollow, battling ungracefully with the sand for foothold. With one hand raised as a screen from the declining sun, the mother of Iskender clenched the other, and shook it down the pathway of those ladies so that the bracelets of coloured glass tinkled upon her strong brown arm.

"Ha, Carûlîn, most ancient virgin, thy stalk is a crane's! There is neither flesh nor blood in thee, but only gristle and dry skin. Thy heart is gall and poison.... O Jane, thou art a fruit all husk; half man, yet lacking man's core, half maid, yet lacking woman's pulp! In thee is no fount of joy, no sweetness. Did love of our Blessed Saviour and the Sacred Book bring the pair of you to this land? By Allah, not so; well I know it! It was the love of change, of adventure; and what is that in a virgin save the hope of men? And now, seeing none have desired you, your longing is turned to hatred of all things sweet! My son is bad, you declare; it is a grace for him to be allowed to sweep your house. But the son of Costantîn—that sly-eyed devil!—he is good: of him you make a clergyman, a grand khawâjah! Have I not washed these twenty years for you and the false priest whose things you are? Was I not among the first to profess your damning heresy? The house of Costantîn are converts of last year. Let Allah judge between us this day."

She paused a moment, the better to gesticulate a frantic reverence to the ladies, now on the opposite slope, who were waving hands to her.

"O poor little Hilda! Thou art a ripe fruit that whispers 'Pluck me.' But those two sexless devils guard thee sleeplessly. Thou wast not angry when Iskender kissed thy mouth. Is it likely, since thou didst incite him to it by previously stroking his hand? But the rest, thy keepers.... Holy Mother of God!... When shall I hear the last of my son's guilt! Iskender is vile, Iskender is worthless, Iskender is the son of all things evil. Ah, if the great lady, the mother of George, had been here, you would never have dared to use the poor lad so, for she loved him from a babe. But alas! she is away in your native land, watching the education of her many children. You and the priest, her husband, were gentler in your ways while she was here. But since she left, you have become true devils. Aye, you are right, forsooth, and the whole world of nature is quite wrong. May Allah set the foot of Iskender upon the necks of you, O false saints!"

With a parting menace of the fist, she turned indoors, still snarling. After the sun-glare on the sands, the room was darkness. Doorway and unshuttered casement framed each its vision of relentless light; but no ray entered.

The place consisted of a single chamber, which, with door and window open as at present, became a draughtway for what air there was. A curtain veiled one corner, where the beds were stowed in daytime, with whatever else was unpresentable through dirt or breakage: for the ladies of the Mission valued tidiness above all virtues, and claimed the right to inspect the abode of their washerwoman and pet proselyte. The mother of Iskender courted their inspection, being secured against complete surprise by the position of her house upon an eminence whence approaching visitors could be descried a long way off. To-day she had run to meet them with delighted cries; but old Carülín had met the welcome in the dullest manner, stalking on into the house, where, instated in the only chair, with hands crossed on the handle of her parasol, she proceeded to give judgment on Iskender, while Jane and Hilda, standing one on either side, contributed their sad Amen to all she said.

"We are more grieved than we can express, Sarah," the old devil concluded in her creaking voice; "more especially on your account, who are a Christian woman. It is solely out of regard for you that we are prepared to take him as a servant, provided he repents and mends his ways. We cannot have him associating with men like that Elias."

She spoke as the mouthpiece of the missionary, the dispenser of wealth and preferment. Sarah was obliged to thank the Lord for her kindness, instead of tearing her eyes out, or treading her dog-face level with the ground. Yet Iskender was robbed of his birthright. It had always been known that one boy of the little congregation would be made a clergyman; and Iskender was clearly designated, his parents having been the first converts, and himself the spoilt child of the Mission till six months ago. Furthermore, he was fatherless, a widow's only son. Yet Asad son of Costantín was put before him. Asad had a father—aye, and a clever one—a father who dwelt at the Mission-house, and was always at the ladies' ears with cunning falsehoods. If only Iskender's father—the righteous Yâcûb—had been still alive! ...

Thus brooding on her wrongs, with lips still murmurous, the mother of Iskender brushed a hand across her eyes, and looked about her. There was the chair still standing in the middle of the room where Carülín had sat.

Snatching up the defiled thing, she swung it to its usual place beside the wall, banging it down with spiteful energy enough to break it. Having stooped to make sure that it was not actually broken, she brushed her eyes again, and wept a little. Then, on a sudden thought, she sprang to the curtained corner, and, groping among mattresses and sweat-stained coverlets which the ladies from the Mission never dared turn over, brought forth a picture of the Blessed Virgin which Iskender had made for her with the help of a paint-box given to him by the Sitt Hilda on his eighteenth birthday. This she set upon a stool against the wall and, crossing herself, knelt down before it. Here was one at least to whom she could expose her wrongs, secure of sympathy—a woman of almighty influence bound to her in the common tie of motherhood.

Was not Iskender clever, handsome, good? For what could any one prefer that lanky, pig-eyed son of Costantín the gardener—the convert of a day, whereas Iskender had been a Protestant from his birth? Naturally, she had looked for some reward of her long adherence. But lo; they thrust her aside, exalting in her stead the mother of Asad son of Costantín. They would never have dared to do it if the wife of the missionary, the excellent mother of George, had not been absent with her children in the land of the English.

At the first planting of the Mission here upon the sandhills, it had seemed to many Christians of the town to promise escape from the repressive shadow of the Muslim, and the protection of a foreign flag which bore the Cross. O sad delusion! That cold priest, those bloodless women, considered nothing but their own comfort. To that they made every convert minister; their notion being to patronise and not to raise; witness Allah how she herself had slaved for them, obeyed and flattered them, for twenty years! By the Gospel, it was black ingratitude that the son of Costantín should be set apart for their priesthood, be made an Englishman, a grand khawâjah, whilst Iskender was offered employment—mark the kindness!—as a scullion and a sweeper in their house—Iskender, who had been their favourite till a month ago!

How had he fallen? Ah, that was a joke indeed! Listen, O Holy Miriam and all saints! It was because one hot afternoon, at their Bible-class, he had kissed the pretty Sitt Hilda, who sat close to him, teaching. Forgetting he was no longer a child, she had caressed his hand approvingly; that was Hilda's tale. A likely one, forsooth! And the lad quite sick for love of her, as an infant of the female sex must have perceived blindfold! Already, before that, they had begun to persecute the lad, finding fault with his painting, his idleness, his language, his smoking—Allah knows with what besides!—so that he was vexed in mind, no longer quite himself. From his birth he had been a sensitive boy, always responsive to a touch of kindness. He was in love with the Sitt Hilda, and his mind was clouded; she touched him fondly, and he kissed her mouth. It was all quite natural. As well blame flowers for opening to the sun! Iskender was immoral, was he? Then what should be said of those who set such ripe and tempting fruit before a youth of the ravenous age, simply to punish him if he made a bite? Ah, they were moral, doubtless! But Our Lady Miriam and the Host of Heaven thought otherwise, they

might be sure!

And if, in the month which had elapsed since then, he had turned his back on prayer-meetings and haunted taverns of the town, whose fault was that? His new associates were not depraved. Their only crime was that they were not Protestants. Even Elias Abdul Messîh, the cause of all this outcry, was a respectable man, only scatter-brained and light-hearted. He was a Christian, not a Muslim or an idolater, so what was there to justify such bitter chiding?

The missionaries called it a crime in Iskender that he idled abroad, trying to make a likeness of the things he saw with his pencils and paints—the gift of the Sitt Hilda, mark that well! It was all their own doing, yet so wrong! Did he smoke a cigarette, it was a sin! Did he call in talk upon the name of Allah—a sin most deadly!...

"Peace on this house!" said a man's complacent voice at the doorway.

Still on her knees, the mother of Iskender turned and peered at the disturber, pressing both hands to her temples. In her confusion on the start the greeting gave her she failed at first to recognise the figure standing forth against the sand-glare, which, now that evening drew on, had the colour of ripe wheat.

"O mother of Iskender, how is thy health to-day?" pursued the visitor; and then she knew him for the brother of her dead husband.

"Is it thyself, Abdullah?" She rose up to greet him. "My soul has grief this day on account of Iskender. They treat him shamefully over yonder—worse than a dog!"

Abdullah rejected her offer of the only chair in favour of a cushion by the wall. He was an elderly man of most respectable appearance, being clad in a blue zouave jacket and pantaloons, both finely braided, a crimson sash at his waist, and on his head a low-crowned fez with long blue tassel hanging to the neck. He wore top boots and held a whip, though he had not come riding. The skin of his face had withered in loose folds, leaving the bushy grey moustache and brows unduly prominent, a crowd of wrinkles round his large brown eyes giving an effect of intelligence to orbs whose real expression was a calm stupidity in keeping with the general dignity of his demeanour.

"Even the son of Costantin—that dirt!—is preferred before him. In this minute I was kneeling to our gracious Lady on his behalf."

"Praise to her!" exclaimed Abdullah, crossing himself. "There is none like her in a difficulty, as I, of all men living, have best cause to know, since she gave me all that I possess."

"Allah increase thy wealth!" said Sarah hastily, fearing the story she had heard a thousand times.

Years ago the respectable Abdullah had been no better than a sot and wastrel, having contracted the habit of drunkenness at Port Said, where he spent three years as porter in a small hotel. He had squandered all his savings and had drunk himself to the verge of madness, when one summer night, as he lay on the floor of his house (as he himself expressed it) "between drunk and sober," the Mother of God appeared to him, "all white and blinding like the sand at noon." The vision, after gazing on him a space, stretched out its hand and vanished. That was all. But Abdullah arose with new heart. Thenceforth he honoured himself, whom God had honoured. The change in him was plain for all to see, and he proclaimed the cause of it aloud with streaming eyes. The Orthodox Church confirmed the miracle, which made a noise at the time. The Patriarch himself wrote the seer a long letter. People who had long since washed their hands of the drunken reprobate vied one with another to help the known favourite of Heaven. Abdullah obtained good employment, first in an hotel at Jerusalem, then with an English traveller of importance. Now, for some years, he had been a trusted dragoman in the pay of a mysterious power called Cook. His religious vogue had passed, his story and the miracle involved were quite forgotten of the multitude. But Abdullah himself remembered, viewing his respectability at the present day with the same feelings of awe and reverence with which he had received it at the first. It was the mantle of the Blessed Virgin, her gift to him. In it lay all his hope for this world and the next.

"It is of Iskender that I come to speak," he said, having pulled out his moustache to the utmost and swallowed twice with solemn gulps preliminary to the announcement. "It hurts my soul to see him wasting time——"

"Enough! enough, I say!" The woman screamed aloud to drown his words. "Am I not already killed with such bad talk, deafened with it, maddened with it every day from morn till night. Ah, by the Gospel, it has grown past bearing! They will no longer make a priest of our Iskender; that honour is for the son of Costantin;—low, cunning devil! Iskender may now, as a favour, sweep their house. Here, in this very room, on yonder chair, the abandoned Carûlin sat and told me the fine news—to me, the mainstay of the Mission, who have not missed a prayer-meeting for twenty years——"

"Allah is merciful!" ejaculated the dragoman. Though himself a staunch supporter of the Holy Orthodox Church, he had a regard for the Protestant, as the faith of the wealthy English. He had looked forward to the welcoming smile of English travellers when he told them that his nephew was a Protestant clergyman. This rejection of Iskender was therefore a disappointment to him. Nevertheless, since God so willed it, there were other occupations that the boy could follow. More insupportable by far was the screaming fury of this woman, which, he feared, might lead her to disgrace her relatives by overt rudeness towards the English missionaries. He said:

"The flush of anger well becomes thee. By Allah, it enriches thy dark beauty, like the bloom on purple grapes."

The mother of Iskender started and blushed hotly, struck in the face by such audacious flattery. She exclaimed:

"Be silent, imbecile! Are such words for the ear of one like me? Keep thy fine phrases for the tourist ladies, who know the fashion, and can answer thee."

"Nay, the daughters of our land nowadays rival the foreign ladies in wit and fashion," said Abdullah gravely, pursuing his advantage. "I myself assisted at a wedding in Beyrût where the ladies talked and jested freely with the gentlemen, with roars of laughter in the Frankish manner. Ah, that was a sight! A hundred carriages, all festively bedecked, conveyed the guests to church, with cracking of whips and shoutings to clear a way. All the women were arrayed in splendid dresses brought from Fransa, and grand big hats with ostrich plumes and flying ribbons. A sight, I tell thee, equal to anything to be seen in Barûs or Lûndra."

"Thou seest such things!" The mother of Iskender pouted, envious. "Here there is never anything to call a show. Even when Daûd el Barûdi married, there were no fine dresses. Every woman present wore the head-veil. I fain would try a Frankish hat myself, but the ladies will not let me—curse their father!"

"They fear to be outshone," put in Abdullah, and continued quickly, apprehending a fresh storm: "Now, as concerns Iskender, I have a project for thee. It was for that I came here, not to blame the lad. Know that a young Englishman arrived yesterday at the Hotel Barûdi, in search of amusement, it would seem, for when Selîm Barûdi inquired how long he wished to stay, he replied it might be all his life if the place pleased him. From that and the plenteousness of his luggage I conclude him to be the son of a good house—no less than an Emîr, by Allah—though why he comes here out of season Allah knows! Elias and the rest have not got wind of him. He as yet knows no one in the land except the two Barûdis and myself, who met him at their house an hour ago. My plan is to present our dear one to him——"

At this point Iskender's mother interrupted him with sudden outcry as of one possessed:

"Aha, O cruel priest! O soured virgins! Let the son of Costantîn be your dog if he will. My son shall tread on all your faces, the friend of an Emîr."

She shook her fist towards the Mission, seen in fierce sunlight through the shadowed doorway.

"Hush, woman!" cried Abdullah in an agony. Her foolish words set wasps about his head. "For the love of Allah, let Iskender anger no man, but be supple, politic, and so respected. Now that he is cast off by your Brûtestânts, there is nothing for it but he must become a dragoman. The Englishman of whom I spoke is but a step. He has need of all men's favour, and must court it diligently.... Where is the boy himself? I thought to find him."

"Ask me not where he is!" The woman raised her hands despairingly. "He went out early this morning with his paint-things, and has not returned. May his house be destroyed! He is the worst of sons. He shuns all counsel, and does nothing that one asks of him. How often have I begged him to renounce his painting, or to go with me to the Mission and make show of penitence. As well instruct the sand. It is likely he will scout this plan of thine. Oh, what have I ever done to be thus afflicted? Why, why has he not the wit of Asad son of Costantîn?"

"Let us go out and meet him," proposed old Abdullah, still bent on diverting her mind from its maddening grievance. "He cannot be far off, and to smell the air is pleasant at this hour."

The mother of Iskender flung her cares aside. To walk out by the side of so respectable a man, at an hour when many people took the air upon the sandhills, was to gain distinction. She draped a black lace shawl upon her head, while Abdullah strode to the doorway and stared out, flicking his boots with his whip. Then, gathering up the skirt of her flowered cotton gown in one hand, she placed the other in Abdullah's arm, ready crooked to receive it.

"It is the fashionable way," she tittered as they set forth.

CHAPTER II

Beyond the ancient town and its dark green orange gardens, between the tilled plain and the shore, the sandhills roll away to north and south, with here a dwelling, there a patch of herbage. To Iskender, lying prone on the crest of the highest dune, caught up into the laugh of sunset, their undulations appeared flushed and softly dimpled, like the flesh of babes. Returning homeward, hungry, from a day of much adventure, he had espied from this eminence a camp of nomads in a certain hollow, and at once forgot his supper in desire to sketch it. He had settled to the work with such complete absorption that Elias Abdul Messîh, his companion, for once grew tired of the sound of his own voice, and left him, with a sigh for his obtuseness. And Iskender was glad to be rid of him, to lie alone and nurse his secret joy; for he had this day made the acquaintance of an Englishman, whose affability restored his pride of life. Might Allah

bless that light-haired youth, for he was the very lord of kindness, and beautiful as an angel from Allah. His cheeks had the same rose-bloom as the Sitt Hilda's, while his blue eyes danced and sparkled like sea-waves in sunlight. How different from the priest of the Mission, whose gaze was of green ice! Moreover, he had praised Iskender's painting and taught him a trick of colouring, which consisted in washing the page yellow and letting it dry before setting to work on it. The artist had never been so happy since the day, six months ago, when the missionary had declared against his sketching as mere waste of time. The ladies of the Mission, who had fostered it, obsequious to the edict, then condemned it strongly. His mother, too, turned round and blamed him for it. Only the Sitt Hilda still was kind, comforting him in secret, till his love leapt up. And then came outer darkness. Iskender was a profligate, and driven forth.

Debarred from Christian society, hardly less than Muslim, by his English education and his Protestantism, he was a pariah in his own land. This very morning, sketching a gateway in the town, he had been beaten by some Muslim boys and called an idol-maker; and, traversing a Christian hamlet among the gardens, had been reviled and pelted by its Orthodox inhabitants. For company he had been obliged to consort with English-speaking touts and dragomans, who welcomed his proficiency in the foreign tongue; and these he hated, for they mocked his art. The one exception was Elias Abdul Messih. Elias could read Arabic fluently (a feat beyond Iskender, who had been schooled in English), and from trips to Beyrût and the towns of Egypt had brought back any number of miraculous romances, which he read and read again until they turned his brain. Impersonating the chief characters, he dwelt in a world of magical adventure, and spoke from thence to ears that understood not. For this he was named the Liar and the Boaster, and, though well liked, derided. He had taken a fancy to Iskender, and often sat beside the artist while he sketched.

His talk revealed new worlds to the pupil of the English missionaries, who hitherto had looked to England as the realm of romantic ambition—the land where, by simply entering holy orders, a poor son of the Arabs could attain to wealth and luxury. Now, for the first time, he was shown the wonders of the East. Elias, in his tales, despised the Christians, his own folk, anathematised the Jews, and praised the Muslims, till Iskender longed to embrace the doctrine of Muhammad, and become a freeman of the land of old romance. But when he said as much, Elias shook his head. It was known that every Muslim would be damned eternally.

Moved by the example of this friend, Iskender's brain conceived wild dreams of greatness, enabling him in imagination to enslave the wicked missionaries and carry off his blushing love amid applause. He told Elias that his father, Yâcûb, had left a treasure buried in the ground, which he would dig up some day, and astound mankind; and Elias accepted the statement as quite probable. But such fancies were of no real comfort to Iskender, being rendered feverish by his sense of wrong. He had known no solace till this day at noon, when the English youth from the hotel had smiled on him. Now, once again, he looked to England as of old—to England where great honours were conferred on painters.

With a final dab at the sky, he held his picture off from him, to mark the effect. In love with the figure of a camel belonging to the camp, which was chewing the cud superbly in the foreground, he had at unawares so magnified the creature that it bestrode the whole page of his drawing-book; while the camp itself, the sandhills, some scattered houses and a palm-tree in the distance, the very sky, seemed no more than the pattern of a carpet upon which it stood. There was something wrong, he perceived—something to do with that perspective which, despite instructions from the Sitt Hilda, he could never rightly comprehend.

But his pride in the monster camel condoned everything. He just lengthened all the tent-ropes a little with his smallest paint-brush, thereby imparting to the black pavilions a look of spiders squashed by the triumphant beast, and laid aside his work, well pleased. There were many groups abroad, of people enjoying the cool evening; he saw them stalking ghostlike in the coloured light; but they kept to the bound sand of the trodden pathways, and if any one descried him on his perch, none laboured up to see what he was after.

At ease upon the ground, with chin on palm, he tried to judge what colours would be needed in order faithfully to reproduce the sunset glow. He compared that glow to the insurgent blood ever ready to mantle in the cheeks of the Sitt Hilda; but this was a warmer, swarthier flush than ever dyed the white skin of a Frank. Then, looking east, he watched the blue increase on the horizon, its drowsy glimmer radiating thoughts of rest, as if a hovering spirit whispered "Hush!" A star glanced out above the distant palm-tree; in that direction it was night already behind the crimsoned earth. A flash from the grand glass windows of the Mission, ruddy with the last of daylight, caused him to wag his head and sigh:

"Would to Allah I were rich like one of them!" The English youth from the hotel had laughed at missionaries. Though here so great and powerful, it seemed they were little thought of in their own country. When Iskender eagerly inquired whether a famous painter would take rank before them, the Englishman had said: "Yes, rather!" with his merry laugh.

"O Allah, help me," was Iskender's prayer now, "that I may travel to the countries of the Franks, and reap the honour they accord to painters!"

This with a fond glance at his drawing-book, which contained a camel—ah, but a camel such as Allah made him!—a camel worthy to be framed in gold and hung in king's palaces!

"Is—ken—der!" A shrill, trailing cry disturbed his reverie; when, looking forth in the direction of the sound, he saw in a dell beneath, where ran a footpath, a man and a woman standing still amid the shadows, gazing up at him.

"Ya Iskender! Make haste, descend, come down to us!" The call came again more peremptorily.

The voice was his mother's. Muttering, "May her house be destroyed!" he emptied the pannikin of paint-foul water which he had carried with him all day long, picked up his drawing-book, and obeyed. As he prepared to descend, the last red gleam forsook the sand-crests, leaving them ashy white.

"Make haste, O shameless loiterer. We bring thee news—fine news! Praise Allah who assigned to thee Abdullah for an uncle—one so kind, so considerate, so thoughtful for thy welfare.~.~. But first I must tell thee how the three ladies came in thy absence to inform me of their intention to educate the son of Costantîn to be a clergyman; whilst thou, whose mother has washed for them these twenty years, art required to sweep their house."

"What matter!" rejoined Iskender, with a listless shrug. "My ambition is to visit the country of the Franks and gain the honour of a mighty painter."

His mother stretched out her hands to heaven, screaming:

"Hear him, Allah! Is he not bewitched? Desire of the lady Hilda has made him mad. O Holy Maryam, O Mar Jiryis and all saints, condemn those who have led him thus to ruin. Hear him now; he would make pictures! Well, to Allah the praise; but it is their doing!~.~. Now, for the love of Allah, put such toys aside and hear Abdullah's generous plan for thy advancement. Know that a young Englishman has lately come to the Hotel Barûdi——"

"I know that well," Iskender grunted irritably. "He is my friend. This day he spent two hours with me."

"Thy friend!~.~. O merciful Allah!" cried his mother.

"Thou knowest him?" exclaimed Abdullah, much affronted.

"Come, cease thy dreaming, tell the story, mad-man!" His mother shook his arm and screamed at him. "Art possessed with thy dumb devil. Speak! What sayest thou?"

"May thy father perish!" cried Iskender, startled.

"Curse thy religion!" retorted his mother hotly. "Is thy uncle dirt to be thus disregarded? Ask his pardon, O my dear!"

Abdullah the dragoman laughed at that, and suggested they had best be moving, for the night was near. A trace of grievance lingered in his voice and manner, for he loved ceremonies, and had looked forward to a formal presentation of his nephew to the English nobleman.

"Come, tell the story of thy day!" he too insisted. At first it had not been a happy one, Iskender told them. He had tried to paint the beauty of the sea between two dunes, but it turned to a blue gate on yellow gate-posts; then a boat turned upside down upon the beach, but the portrait made resembled nothing earthly. Then the Englishman had taught him a new way, and things went well, and he had drawn a camel.~.~.

He was opening his sketch-book to display the masterpiece; but his mother shrieked:

"Who cares to hear all that. Tell of the Englishman; how came he with thee?"

"They stoned me," he replied indifferently; "and I was running from them, weeping, when he met me, and I cried to him in English to protect me. He had compassion on me, and admired my pictures——"

Iskender became aware that his companions were no longer listening, so stopped abruptly. His uncle seemed to think some miracle had happened, for he heard him praising Allah and the Holy Virgin, the while his mother kept exclaiming in her shrill-pitched tones. His mind strayed far from them, occupying itself with distant features of the landscape. All the earth was now obscure: stars sparkled in the dome of the sky. From a high, sandy neck their path surmounted, he beheld the minarets of the town, seeming to cut the sky above the sharp sea-line. The timbre of his mother's voice made for inattention like the monotonous shrill note of the cicada; and he had at all times a trick of projecting his wits into the scene around him, whence it needed a shout to re-collect them, as she knew to her grievance. She shouted now, and punched him in the back:

"Forget not to tell the Emîr that thou art a Brûtestant, which is half an Englishman."

Jarred in his bones by her shrillness, he exclaimed:

"Merciful Allah! Is my mother mad? The Emîr! In the name of angels, what Emîr?"

"O Holy Maryam! Am I not unblessed in such a son? What wonder that the priest and the ladies favour the son of Costantîn—may his house be destroyed!—who has at least the grace to listen when one speaks to him.~.~. Thou goest in the morning to the Hotel Barûdi, to visit formally this English youth, who is an Emîr in his own country, and proffer thy services. Thou wilt present thyself before him, not as now in a soiled kaftan, but in thy best. Give him to know how thy mother is esteemed by the missionaries, how thou art thyself a Brûtestânt of the English Church."

"Whist!" said Abdullah warily.

Some one was hurrying towards them down the path.

"Who is it?" breathed the mother of Iskender.

It was Elias, who was looking for his friend.

"No word to him, or all is lost!" hissed old Abdullah.

But Elias for the moment had no ears. After parting from Iskender he had been seized with a new and vivid inspiration, and felt the need of his accustomed listener. Dragging his friend aside he whispered breathlessly:

"I am in great haste. A lady—ah, a beauty!—waits for me—a Muslimeh, I do assure thee—one of the most closely guarded. I go now to the tryst. It is to risk my life; but what care I, for love has maddened me. I would not tell a living soul save thee; but if I die in the adventure, thou wilt pray for me. I sought thee in thy house, but found thee not."

"May Allah guard and prosper thee!" replied Iskender.

But by then his friend was gone, driven on by the fierce wind of his imagining towards the house-door, not far distant, where his wife stood looking for him. Iskender could not prevent a lump from rising in his throat at the vision of requited love, however perilous. From a dream of the Sitt Hilda he was roused by his mother saying:

"Thou must sup with us, O Abdullah! After all thy kindness to Iskender, thou canst scarce refuse me."

They were at the house.

With a polite show of reluctance Abdullah entered, and sat down beside the wall, while Iskender helped his mother spread the feast for him. Then, when all was ready, the young man wrapped some morsels in a piece of bread, and carried them out beyond the threshold, to be alone. Squatting there, he was once more happy in thoughts of the fair young Englishman who, though a prince, had shown such kindness towards him. By Allah, he would give his life for that sweet youth. He asked no better than to serve him always.

The highest lobes of the cactus hedge before him were like great hands shorn of fingers thrust against the sky. Through a gap he beheld the lights of the Mission—fierce hostile eyes intent upon his thoughts. The wail and bark of a jackal came from the landward plain.

"Praise to Allah!" The voice of his mother raised for a moment above its monotone caused him to turn and look into the house.

They had made an end of eating in there and were now arranging the programme of Iskender's conduct towards the young Emîr. His uncle sat cross-legged by the wall, puffing slowly at a narghileh, his mother opposite to him, in the same posture, also with a narghileh, not smoking for the moment, but leaning forward with one hand out, talking eagerly. A saucer-lamp stood on the floor between them, among remnants of the feast; it caused their faces to look ghastly, lighted thus from below, and sent their shadows reeling up the wall. The woman declaimed untiringly with gestures of demonstration, and the man kept acquiescing by a nod which set the tassel of his fez in motion.

The dull sententiousness of the dragoman and his mother's shrill, rash judgments were alike irritating to Iskender. They claimed to understand the foreigners perfectly; and in truth they knew enough of the foibles of the lords of gold to secure to themselves a livelihood. They had never, either of them, loved a Frank.

CHAPTER III

Next morning Iskender was disturbed at daybreak by the movements of his mother in the house. With her black locks all dishevelled, she was putting out his grandest clothes and dusting them in the feeble lamp-light.

"Though shalt wear this sweet suit which thy father left thee," she croaked out when she knew he was awake. "That and thy new tarbûsh and the great umbrella. Wallah, thou wilt fill men's eyes. Now rise, and make haste with thy washing."

He rose accordingly and, having dedicated his works to God, dipped a hand-bowl in the earthen jar which served as cistern, and carried it out on to the sand before the threshold. There the rising colour of the dawn bewitched him; he was reminded of a certain trumpet-flower which bloomed at Easter on the Mission walls—a flower with purple petals and the gleam of gold in its heart; and, all on fire to register the rare impression, he left his bowl of water on the sand and re-entered the house to fetch his book and paint-box. But his mother tried to wrest them from him, cursing him for a maniac, and before he could shake her off the colours of the sky had

changed completely. The little disappointment made life vain. In a pet, he overturned the basin of water, robbed of the heart to wash his face and hands. Then, as his mother still kept screaming for him, he went indoors and donned the clothes which she had laid ready. Even then she would not let him be, but pulled and patted at the garments till he lost his temper, and made a rush for the door. A horrified shriek recalled him. The umbrella! He had forgotten that! His mother thrust it on him. Gathered up into a bunch and tied, not folded, it in shape resembled a charged distaff of unusual size. With it tucked beneath his arm, the youth escaped at last into the rosy sunlight.

Up on the well-marked road which runs out to the Mission from the town he encountered Costantin, the missionary's servant, driving a donkey burdened with two jars of water up towards the house. Costantin remarked upon his finery, and asked where he was going. He showed an amiable inclination to stop and talk. But Iskender hurried on, merely explaining that he was going to be a great painter in the land of the English. Costantin stood scratching his head and staring after him.

The road soon left the sandhills and meandered through thick orange-groves, full of shade and perfume and the hum of bees. Here he advanced with circumspection, and at a turn of the way stood still to reconnoitre.

From that point he could see a Christian village, dignified in the distance by two palm-trees put up like sunshades over its squat mud hovels. The tiny church stood apart, quite overshadowed by an ancient ilex. It was there that he had been pelted yesterday; but at present all looked safe. Only two human beings were in sight—the priest, one Miftri, eminent in black robe and tower-like headdress, sat in thought beneath the oak-tree, and a child in a sky-blue kirtle sprawled at play upon the threshold of one of the houses. The coo of doves and cluck of hens, the only voices, sounded peaceful in the sun-filled air. Iskender moved on, trusting hard in Allah to save his Sunday clothes from base defilement.

The priest Miftri, seated in the shade, was playing an innocent game with two pebbles, which he threw into the air and caught alternately, when Iskender, approaching humbly, wished him a happy day. He returned the greeting mechanically, then, seeing who it was, let fall his playthings and stared solemnly at the disturber. Iskender became uncomfortably conscious of his festive raiment, more especially of the umbrella, which seemed to fascinate Miftri.

For release from the embarrassment of being silently devoured by eyes as fierce and prominent as a bull's, he paused before the priest and asked his blessing. At that the staring orbs betrayed amazement; their owner raised a hand to stroke his long black beard. The child in the sky-blue shift had left its play to observe the encounter. Standing up against the darkness of the doorway it revealed the figure of a slim young girl.

Still gazing fixedly at the suppliant, who stood trembling before him, the priest seemed to ponder the request. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet, crying: "Come with me!" and, seizing Iskender's arm, dragged the terrified youth into the church, of which the door stood open. In there the sudden gloom, combined with a stale smell of incense, overpowered the victim.

"Prostrate thy sinful self!" the priest enjoined.

Iskender fell upon his face obediently. To perform the prostration he was obliged to discard for a moment the great umbrella. When he rose from his knees the priest had hold of it.

"Wherefore dost thou require a blessing of me?"

Iskender confessed that he was about to present himself before a certain great one, in the hope of patronage, and felt the need of Heaven's favour to support his worthlessness.

"What is his name, this great one?"

"That I know not. The man in question is the young Inklizi who honours the hotel of Müsa el Barudi. I know only that he is a great Emir, and hates the missionaries."

"Then he must be of the High Church of that land, which yet holds faithful, christening by immersion, and scorning the interpolation of the swine of Rome. May he be a guide to thee, poor unbaptized one. Now, for the blessing, give me ten piasters!"

"Ten piasters!" gasped Iskender.

The enraged ecclesiastic pinched the objector's ear, and twisted it until its owner writhed in anguish. "For a heretic like thee it should be thrice as much. Remember I have power to bind as well as to loose. Insult this place again with heathen haggling, and by the keys of heaven and of hell, I curse thee leprous."

Iskender fell on his knees and howled for mercy.

"I have no money with me," he explained most piteously.

"Is that in truth the case?" The priest let go his ear, and seemed to meditate. Iskender was aware of the girl in the sky-blue robe gazing in at the doorway. Her presence added to his ignominy. "No matter! Thou shalt pay the price another time, and in the meanwhile I shall keep this fine umbrella."

"Alas, it is not mine!" Iskender wrung his hands.

But Mîtri had already withdrawn into the inner darkness of the sanctuary, whence he emerged directly, but without the umbrella. Something white and glittering now adorned his shoulders.

As he came towards Iskender, the light from the doorway picking him out from the surrounding gloom, he seemed to bear with him a mystic radiance. The young man knelt instinctively and pressed his forehead to the ground; while the voice of the priest, now grown tender and melodious, seemed to warble far above him like a voice from heaven. An angel stood in the place of his late tormentor.

"It is not thy fault that thou art a Brûtestânt," said Mîtri kindly, when the blessing was concluded. "Come to me sometimes; let us talk things over. I discern in thee some mind to know the truth."

"Is he indeed a Brûtestânt, my father?" The girl in the sky-blue shirt had stolen close to them. "Ah, woe is me that one so goodly should go the way of everlasting punishment!"

She wore no garment but the long straight kirtle. Her hair, brought low round either temple to be plaited in a tail behind, increased the shadow of her eyes—great thoughtful eyes, which made the childish face divine. Iskender, smitten dumb with admiration, at that moment thought of Protestantism as a foul crone.

"May thy house be destroyed, O Nesîbeh, shameless girl!" the priest rebuked her. "What have this youth's looks to do with thee? Thou art grown too big to be allowed such freedom. It is time thou didst assume the veil, and with it modesty." He took his daughter's hand and fondled it, none the less, adding: "Whence this religious fervour, soul of mischief?"

It was with a sigh that Iskender parted from them and he went slowly, often turning to look back at the little church beneath the oak-tree, till his road debouched into a crowded highway, where the long intent procession of the fellâhîn conveying the produce of their fields to market on the backs of camels, mules and asses, on the heads of women, reminded him of his own errand. He then made haste to the hotel of Mûsa el Barûdi.

The two sons of Mûsa, Daûd and Selîm, clad in robes of striped silk, and high red fezzes, sat out on stools, one on either side of the doorway, to feel the morning sun and chat with wayfarers. Behind them, against the doorpost, leaned a tall negro in white robe and turban, who held a broom in his hand, but seemed to have done with sweeping. Iskender approached this group with low obeisance.

"Is his Highness the Emîr within?"

The black alone condescended to heed the inquiry. He replied with the broadest of grins:

"May Allah heal thy intelligence. Art possessed with a devil, or a joker merely?"

"I mean the young khawâjah who resides here all alone," Iskender explained, replying to the negro, though his eyes kept looking from Daûd to Selîm, whose perfect impassivity surprised him. He grieved for the loss of his umbrella, which would have compelled more respect.

"Ah," grinned the negro, seeing light. "He is at breakfast."

"Then with permission, I will wait till he comes forth."

"What is this youth?" cried Daûd irritably, without looking.

"Bid him depart!" said Selîm, moving impatiently in his seat as though a fly annoyed him.

Of a sudden both the brothers rose and bowed profoundly, laying hand to breast, and lips, and brow, as a Muslim notable passed up the street on horseback. Then they sank down again, and the obsequious smile died away on their faces, leaving them cold and haughty as before.

"The great khawâjah is my very good friend. He loves me dearly," proffered Iskender in his own excuse. "By Allah, he is the nicest of men! He will be overjoyed to find me here this morning."

The scornful eyes of Daûd glanced on him for a brief moment, while Selîm, in his turn, questioned:

"Who is this?"

"Is it not the son of one Yâcûb, a muleteer, who sold his soul years ago to the English missionaries. It seems such renegades are well paid, for behold the raiment of this youth. What wouldst thou here, O dog, son of a dog?"

"I ask but to see my friend the Emîr, who loves me dearly—by Allah, I speak but the truth!" pleaded Iskender, near to tears.

"Now by the sword of St. George," vociferated Daûd, roused at last, "none of thy species enters my father's door. Ours is an

honourable house, respected far and near. If any of our clients needs a guide or servant, we know where to send for one who may be trusted. We tolerate no lickspittle-rogues, no beggars. Remember the abominations of thy father and the extraordinary unchastity of thy mother, and take thy shameful face elsewhere away from us."

"O my kind lords!" Iskender began to protest; but just then Selim, who had been silently working himself into a fury while his brother spoke, sprang up, and snatching the broom from the black servant's hand, discharged it at Iskender's head with all his strength. The son of Yacub, by a lucky move, escaped the missile; but seeing the negro stepping forth to recover his broom, stayed to make no retort.

Having retired to the opposite side of the street, which was in shadow, he sat down on the doorstep of a Frankish shop, and waited. He saw his friend of yesterday come forth at last, Selim and Daud rising for his passage. As he paused upon the steps to taste the sunny air, Iskender caught his eye and ran to greet him. The Emir was gracious, asking how he did, and at once proposing they should walk together. Iskender gave the sons of Musa a triumphant glance.

"Where are your sketching things?" the Frank inquired; and hearing they were left behind, would go and fetch them. They sauntered together through the gardens out on to the sandhills, till within a stone's-throw of Iskender's home; when the Englishman lay down on a patch of withered herbage, saying he would wait there till his friend returned.

Iskender passed the broken hedge at a bound and stood before his mother in the doorway. She screamed to Allah for protection, in the first surprise.

"Come, O my mother! Come and look!" he cried, and dragged her to a point whence they could see the young Emir, lying flat on his back, his straw hat covering his face, for the sun was strong. "It is himself," Iskender whispered, dashing on into the house; while his mother made wild reverence in the Frank's direction, quite oblivious of the fact that the object of her bows and servile gestures could not, from the circumstances of his position, see them.

"Make all speed, O beloved!" she implored Iskender. "It is not well that his Highness should remain extended in the hot sun. Allah forbid that he should get a sunstroke, for his life is precious. May our Lord preserve him for a blessing to us!" But while she spoke her son was out of hearing.

Returning towards the town, the two friends had to pass the Christian village by the ilex-tree, and the Emir, who had seen Iskender stoned there, insisted on his sketching the small church, vowing to punish all who dared molest him. Remembering the priest's daughter, he was fain, and went to Miti's house to ask for water. The girl herself appeared in answer to his call, but, seeing who it was, ran back in terror, crying: "O mother, help! It is the Brutestant." Whereat a slattern dame came forth instead of her, and filled his can for him, with every blessing.

Soon after, as he sat at work beneath the oak, the priest himself appeared. Iskender rose and presented the Emir, who welcomed the introduction with his ready smile.

"So the blessing worked, the praise to Allah!" was Miti's comment. He made the Englishman enter his house and drink coffee, then took him into the church. The door stood open. Iskender caught some fragments of the priest's discourse, from which it appeared that he was displaying vestments and a holy relic. When they emerged, the Frank was thrusting money on the priest, who declined to take it, till Iskender shouted:

"It is for the poor."

"For the poor, it is well." Miti smiled and accepted the offering. Then, with a knowing glance at the son of Yacub, he once more vanished into the church, to reappear next minute with the great umbrella. "Thou hast redeemed the pledge, my son," he said, as he restored it to its lord, and winked discreetly. "But what have we here? By Allah, thou art a complete painter, a professor of the art! There am I, like life. There is my house, the church, the palm-trees. O young man, thou art a devil at this work. A pity thou art a Brutestant, else thou couldst make a trade of it, and make us pictures of the Blessed for our churches. Come, O Nesibeh, see the pretty picture."

Iskender fixed his gaze upon the sketch. He dared not look up, for the girl was at his shoulder. The whole population of the place, his foes but yesterday, now gathered round him, praising Allah for his wondrous talent; while the Emir denounced the bad quality of the paint-box, gift of the Sitt Hilda, and swore to have a proper one sent out from England. Iskender's heart was like to burst with pride and happiness.

CHAPTER IV

It wanted but an hour of sunset when Iskender parted from the Frank. His very brain was laughing, and he trod on air as he strode off, hugging the great umbrella. At noonday he had had his meal at the hotel (no matter though it was flung to him in the entry as to a

dog) and afterwards had walked again with the Emîr, showing his Honour the chief buildings of the town. Not a few of his acquaintance had beheld his glory, among them Elias the great talker. No doubt but that the fame of it was noised abroad. In no hurry to go home, for his mother had already heard the tidings, he bent his steps towards a tavern where the dragomans were wont to assemble at that hour.

Leaving the road of red-roofed foreign houses in which was the hotel, he crossed a stable-yard, and then a rubbish-heap, and passed through tunnels to the main street of the town, a narrow, shaded way leading down to the shore. Here, what with spanning arches and the merchants' awnings, it was dark already; the business of the shops appeared belated; the sunlit sea beyond was like a vision. Dodging his way through the crowd, avoiding bales and groaning camels, he traversed half the street, then turned in at a gateway worthy of the noblest mosque.

Within was a kind of cloister, three parts ruined, which had once, it was said, appertained to a Christian church. On one side the outer wall had fallen, allowing a view through shadowy arches of the sunset on the sea; on the other, just within the colonnade, an enterprising cook had placed his brazier and all else that is required to make a tavern. Wherever the ground was clear of débris stools were set, and men sat talking, smoking slow narghilehs. The fragrance of coffee stewing filled the place, mixed with the peculiar odour of a charcoal fire.

Here the English-speaking dragomans used to meet together at the cool of the day, to practise the tongue of their profession and discuss the news. Clad in the gayest Oriental clothing to attract the foreigner, their talk was all of Europe and its social splendours. At the moment of Iskender's entrance, a man named Khalîl was gravely playing English music-hall airs on a concertina, having acquired the art by instruction from an English sailor at Port Said.

Iskender advanced self-consciously, knowing himself the hero of the hour. And in the twinkling of an eye the music ceased; he was surrounded. Elias, a saffron sash at his waist, a scarlet dust-cloak streaming from his shoulders, flung an arm around his dear friend's neck, and cried:

"I saw thee! Thou art in luck, my dear; for thy man is of the noblest. I know him well by sight, for he is of the intimate friends of my lady."

This had reference to an illusion of Elias, who always maintained that he was the lover of an English princess, and had spent a whole year as her guest among the nobles of that distant land.

"Thou shalt present me to him, O my soul," cried a man in yet more gorgeous raiment, "that I may judge of his character, and teach thee how to work him to the best advantage."

"Aye, it behoves thee to present thy friends," rejoined another. "He is a generous man, it is known; they say he gave a sovereign to our father Mîtri."

Iskender promised freely. He saw his uncle beckoning to him, and obeyed the gesture, breaking loose from the throng of courtiers. Abdullah removed his stool to a distant spot among the ruins, whither the servant of the tavern carried two narghilehs. He made his nephew sit and smoke with him, then asked:

"What news?"

"The best—thanks to Allah," replied Iskender. "The Emîr has shown great love for me, and is having a grand new paint-box sent from the land of the English."

"Pshaw!" said Abdullah, a shade of annoyance on his brow. "Put away such playthings, which lead nowhere. Let thy whole study be to please his Honour. In dealing with all travellers the first thing is to keep them interested; for if their mind is dull a single moment they blame the dragoman and give him a bad report. Thou art conversant with the Sacred Book. Quote from it freely in connection with common sights; as, for instance, if thou seest people ploughing, refer straightway to Mâr Elias who ploughed with twelve yoke of oxen before him; if a woman fetching water from the spring, mention her with whom Our Saviour talked beside Samaria. Things common among us are strange to them. To-morrow take thy patron to the bath, and conduct him through all its stages. Thence bring him to my house, where thou shalt find a meal which will not fail to please him. To sit on the floor as we do, and eat with fingers from one dish, affords delight to foreigners. Above all things, keep him for thine own. I say nought against thy taking him this day to Mîtri, though the visit has made a noise. Our father Mîtri is an upright man. But these——"

He jerked his thumb in the direction of the other dragomans, now howling in chorus to the strains of the concertina.

"——These are all rivals—enemies. In the season thy Emîr would seem as nothing to them; but now he is the only game in sight. Avoid them; lead thy lord away from them. Thy coming here this evening was a fault. Go now and quietly, lest they trap thee somehow. I expect thee at my house at noon to-morrow."

Iskender saw the wisdom in these words. He shot a glance over his shoulder at the other dragomans. They were still busy singing to the concertina. Touching his uncle's hand, he stepped out through the open arches and scrambled down over rocks and fallen masonry to the sea-beach, whence he made his way home through the twilight. His mother had heard of his introducing his Emîr to the

priest Mîtri, and blamed the folly of it, till she learnt how thereby he had redeemed the great umbrella. Even then she still declared it was a pity. It would put the missionaries in a perfect fury, since an Orthodox priest was the devil in their eyes; and was certain to rouse the cupidity of other people. Allah had blessed Iskender with the friendship of a mighty prince. She bade him keep the blessing to himself, not let it waste away in gifts to strangers.

Her words confirmed the counsel of the wise Abdullah. Iskender resolved to follow it to the letter. But when, presenting himself before his lord next morning, he announced the programme for the day, the Frank raised unforeseen objections. He would in no case visit the bath, he said, having heard that they used dirty water there. It was with difficulty that Iskender won him to view Abdullah's invitation with some favour.

Abdullah's house was in the town itself, hard by the shore. It stank in the approach, as the Frank was not slow to remark; but within all was swept and perfumed for the occasion. Borrowed mats strewed the floor. Two candles burned upon a little shelf, before a picture of the Blessed Virgin placed there in remembrance of the famous vision. And the host omitted no formula of politeness that had ever been used by a son of the Arabs to felicitate and set at ease an honoured guest. The Emîr, completely reassured, smiled graciously. The food, when it appeared, was tasty and abundant, and his Honour seemed to like it. But Iskender knew that it was of the cheapest: the whole feast had not cost his uncle ten piasters. When the Emîr, at taking leave, put two mejidis in Abdullah's hand, he bit his lip and cursed the old man's guile.

Thenceforth he determined to keep all English-speaking persons at a distance, since their whole endeavour seemed to be to cheat his loved Emîr. But it was not so easy to discard his old acquaintance.

That same evening, after parting from his patron, he ran right into the arms of a pair of merry fellows, who announced their playful purpose to detain him. Both wore their fezzes at a rakish angle, both had a rosary dangling fashionably from the left hand, both talked and laughed uproariously—secure in their employment by a foreign tourist agency from the disgust of the Muslim population, whose scowls shadowed them. Elias Abdul Messîh was one of them. The other, who boasted a very large hooked nose, like a parrot's beak, which reduced the rest of his face to insignificance, was Yuhanna Mahbûb, a famous bully.

"Now we have thee!" cried Elias, laughing loudly. "By Allah, it is rude in thee to shun thy friends."

"Is it true that the Emîr gives thee an English pound every day?" inquired Yuhanna.

"He is good enough to treat me as a brother, and has sworn, of his benevolence, to make my fortune," Iskender modestly admitted.

"Pshaw! Promises—I know them!" sneered Yuhanna. "Coined money is the only thing I put my faith in."

"We crave a boon of thee," pursued Elias coaxingly. "Bring the khawâjâh to the house of Karlsberger to-morrow afternoon. We will make a feast in his honour and thine. Say yes, O my soul!"

"Aye, promise," snarled Yuhanna, "or we shall know thou hast a mind to slight us, and take steps accordingly."

Iskender promised, with intent to fail them, for the Emîr's protection made their threat quite harmless. He pursued his way down a sandy road through the orange-gardens, which looked black beneath the sunset—of unusual splendour owing to the presence in the sky of ragged clouds. A fellah who passed remarked that rain was coming.

"Art on the way to visit me?" A hand fell suddenly upon Iskender's shoulder. A tall black-clad form had overtaken him, unheard by reason of the muffling sand. It was the priest Mîtri. "Or dost thou fear to incur the anger of the English missionaries? By Allah, thou art wrong to fear them. Their religion is of man's devising; its aim is worldly comfort, which will fail them at the Last Day; whereas ours is the faith of Christ and the Holy Apostles, the same for which thy fathers suffered ages before the invention of the Brûtestânt heresy. It is the faith of the true Romans who reigned in the city of Costantîn, when Rome had reaped the reward of her heathen iniquity and lay in ruins, a haunt of brigands and wild beasts. Is it not a sin that, after the lapse of so many ages, people calling themselves Christians, people who have never suffered hardship for their faith as we do, come hither and wage war upon the Church in her bound and crippled state, seducing the feeble and the avaricious by the spectacle of their wealth and the prospect of foreign protection? These heretics—and the Muscovites, our co-religionists, alas! with them—conspire against the Sultan, who is our sole defender. With the Muslimin we have in common language, country, and the intercourse of daily life. Therefore, I say, a Muslim is less abominable before Allah than a Latin or a Brûtestânt."

The priest stopped speaking suddenly and embraced Iskender, kissing him repeatedly on both cheeks. At the same moment a little cavalcade went ambling by, which solved the riddle of his strange behaviour. Iskender caught a scowl of disapproval from the Sitt Carûlîn, a glance of agonised appeal from the Sitt Hilda, and then a malicious grin from old Costantîn, as he ran by on foot, prodding with his staff the hindmost jackass, on which the Sitt Jane sat up with face averted. The three ladies were clad in white with mushroom hats and fluttering face-veils. Their bodies bulged now here, now there, like sacks of grain, obedient to the motion of the trotting donkeys.

"There they go, mothers of all contention, shameless meddlers!" said Mîtri, peering after them in the twilight. "Ha, ha! I angered them, the praise to Allah. I made them tremble for their nursling!"

Iskender made no answer, feeling angry with the priest. At that reproachful glance of the Sitt Hilda, all his childhood had risen up and testified against him. His heart was stricken with profound compunction. He broke away from Mîtri as soon as possible, refusing an invitation to enter his house and argue with him, and sped on across the sandhills to his own home. There, in the little house, a lamp was lighted; his mother stood at the doorway looking out for him. Breathless, he informed her of his encounter with the Mission ladies, and the priest's vile trick to shame him.

"Aha," she laughed, "a famous joker is our father Mîtri. I would give much to have seen the faces of those harridans! Nevertheless, may his house be destroyed, for he has done me an ill-turn with his foolery. The ladies are certain to come here tomorrow, deafening me with the outcry of their poisonous spite. For thee, it recks not, thou hast thy Emîr. In sh' Allah thou wilt soon get money from him. Then thou canst laugh at the malevolence of these hypocrites!"

But Iskender was not to be so easily consoled. He lay awake that night, a prey to poignant self-disgust, remembering in turn his happy childhood at the Mission, his love for the Sitt Hilda, and his recent frowardness, each with a vividness that hurt his brain. Even the patronage of a great Emîr seemed nothing worth as compared with the affection of those who had brought him up. The Emîr spoke lightly of religion; he despised the missionaries; it might well be he was wicked, a servant of the Evil One, a creature of that outer darkness into which he (Iskender) had fallen through his own fault. Then he thought of the priest Mîtri, and of the beautiful child who for a moment had ensnared his fancy; and was overwhelmed with pity for himself. He belonged to nobody. The missionaries loved him so little that they were content to cast him off for small offences; while for the Orthodox he remained a Protestant, a filthy thing. In his thirst for comfort he was driven back on dreams of greatness, of buried treasure some day to be found, which would cause the English and the natives of the land alike to grovel in the dirt before him. Warmed by such thoughts he fell asleep at last.

When he awoke in the morning his mind was healed. He viewed the Mission with the old resentment, and placed his every hope in the Emîr. On his way to the hotel he saw the daughter of Mîtri throwing crumbs to the church pigeons, and blew a kiss to her with words of love, only to laugh loud when, picking up a stone, she cursed his father. At the entering-in of the town he was accosted by Elias, who sprang suddenly from the shade of a cactus-hedge. Yuhanna followed, yawning. It was clear that they had been lying in wait.

"This afternoon, at the house of Karlsberger; forget not," Elias cried. "We have ordered a fine feast in thy friend's honour."

"Fail us not, or it shall be the worse for thee," put in Yuhanna.

Iskender swore obedience to their will and hurried on, mentally resolved to hire horses and take his Emîr for a ride until the evening. It would be easy to say the Frank had willed it so, in which case none could blame him. With this in mind he entered the hotel. But again his Emîr proved refractory. The air that morning oppressed him, he declared, and the sons of Mûsa said that it was going to rain. He proposed a stroll to some near spot among the gardens, where he could read while his companion sketched.

Iskender still had hope to foil the dragomans. He led his patron in a direction opposite to that where he had left Elias. But, looking back, he saw two figures shadowing them, and knew the game was up.

In fact, no sooner had they found a cool retreat than Elias and Yuhanna sauntered up, hailing Iskender with delight as loving comrades. He was obliged to present them to his Emîr, and from the moment of introduction they had words for no one else, inquiring how his Honour liked the place, and asking if he knew this and that great lord of the English with whom they, by their own accounts, stood high in favour. They presented their invitation with every circumstance of respect, and the Emîr accepted it; and then, by the veriest accident, the eyes of Yuhanna happened to light upon the ousted youth.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you like this little one, our dear Iskender! A good boy, sir, only don't know much yet. Baints fery nicely, for a young 'un. He show you, sir, the way this afternoon."

A tear fell splash upon Iskender's drawing-book.

CHAPTER V

The house of Karlsberger stood in a hollow of the southern sandhills, only discoverable on a close approach, so that the sight of its red roof, something like an extinguisher, came always as a surprise.

Its owner was of the number of those Jewish immigrants who, lured by the offer of perpetual charity, had of late years come in their thousands to occupy lands provided by their rich co-religionists. But the life of a husbandman soon palled on Karlsberger, accustomed to trade upon the vices of a European city; and his wife, a former harlot, shared his disgust. As soon as he could gather money enough he had left agriculture to the dullards, and built this house near the town as a rendezvous for all who loved the flavour of depravity. For the dragomans and their kind the house of Karlsberger stood for the fashion and gay life of Europe.

Thither Iskender conducted his lord in the manner of a reluctant follower rather than a guide. He had said all he could to dissuade the Frank from going, had exaggerated the ill repute of the place, and called the dragomans low, drunken blackguards; but all in vain. The Emîr was bent on going; and his slave went with him miserably, feeling sure that the kindness he had himself inspired would not survive the introduction to a set of dashing fellows, whose profession it was to win the hearts of foreigners. The air was sultry, the expanse of sand glared hatefully beneath a sky veiled all over with thin cloud. All nature, in accordance with his mood, seemed glum and spiteful.

In sight of the house he pointed to it without a word. It looked in truth a pretty place for a great prince to visit. With a gloomy satisfaction Iskender noticed filth about the threshold, and shabby garments spread to dry upon the window-sill.

Sounds of talk and laughter came from the open door. They ceased directly the Emîr was seen by those within; and some dozen men, assembled in a narrow room, rose as one and saluted. The room had been roughly cleaned for the occasion, the dust and filth of the floor having been swept into the four corners, where it lay in heaps. The ceiling and the white-washed walls were grimy, and dust made a bloom on the ragged curtains of the window, looped pretentiously; a three-legged table all but filled the room, leaving just room for one to pass around it. His lord was ushered to the seat of honour, a sofa covered with a fabric which had once been plush, but now resembled draggled sealskin; while Iskender went quite unnoticed till the wife of Karlsberger—a bulky slattern, who kept shuffling in and out with plates and glasses—perceived his need, and placed a stool for him. Through confusion and annoyance he caught nothing of the conversation till Elias, in a mincing voice, announced:

"The grub quite ready."

The Englishman laughed at that; upon which Elias, dancing up to him, exclaimed:

"You are a good fellow; I see that. I like you, and so blease to see you here."

All then drew close to the table, on which were set forth many tempting viands, including mottled discs of German sausage, anchovies, pickled gherkins, and huge chunks of Frankish bread. A bottle of rum and a bottle of gin stood one at each end of the board,

attended by glasses of all shapes and sizes.

"Allow me to helb you, sir—a bit of sausage?" cried Elias, seizing a knife and presenting it at the dish in question. The Emîr laughed again, which was the signal for an obsequious roar. He said he would prefer some bread and anchovy, and could help himself. He accepted a little of the rum for politeness' sake, and then professed himself satisfied. After some outcry on his lack of appetite the rest of the party fell to with avidity. The presence of his uncle, which he now realised for the first time, relieved Iskender from the fear of personal indignity. He, too, attacked the viuals with good appetite, but refused the spirits, strong in the example of Abdullah's abstinence. The work of eating was soon done, and every one sat back for conversation. There was much ostentatious picking of teeth, and noises of repletion came from all sides. Tongues were loosed, and vied one with another to display deep knowledge of the English speech and manners. The company abounded in expressions such as "old chap," "never say die," and "right you are!" which Iskender, from his education, knew to be inappropriate. Every one too, except Abdullah, made believe to revel in the gin and rum, out of compliment to the guest, whose national drink it was; but Iskender was not deceived by their hilarity. Sitting at the opposite end of the room to his patron, he saw the wry faces which were turned away at every sip. Elias, quite beside himself with adulation, and intoxicated already by the success of his facetious sallies, drank and drank again with convivial gestures.

"Ha, ha!" he cried, "I'm feelin' deflish habby. So fery nice to be with English beeble. The English are our friends; they're Christians like what we are. Bleas God, they take this country like they taken Egybt, and gif the Turks an' Muslims good old Hell! Ha, ha! we're English, we are, just the same. The Turks all done for—no dam' good. The Christians kick 'em all the time. They got to lick our boots, that's sure. The English they soon string up the rotten ole Sultan, first they christen 'im jus' for luck——"

His words were drowned in cries of horrified protest; his neighbours at the table flung themselves upon the rash talker, stopping his mouth forcibly with their hands; while old Abdullah rose up in authority and loudly denounced such sentiments as high treason, with glances at the open door as at an audience. Iskender could see the Frank was quite bewildered; he sat smiling on all that occurred without intelligence. Elias, when let go, was laughing heartily.

"Well, I neffer!" he observed. "Who's afraid?"

Just then Khalil, the concertina-player, a dull-eyed, fattish man, who had kept silence, suddenly drew all eyes upon himself by picking up his instrument from the floor and playing a few chords softly.

"All right, Khalil! Come along then! Neffer say die, ole chabbie!" Elias encouraged him.

"I blay you 'Bob goose the Whistle,'" said the musician seriously, and at once struck up a jerky Frankish tune, with eyes intently fixed on the Emîr, garnering his every smile and sign of pleasure. When his Honour showed a disposition to sing the words of the refrain, he played more loudly than before in triumph. All present flung back their heads and bawled in discord, producing a din so horrible that the Jew Karlsberger, with his wife and child, appeared from an inner room with scared white faces.

"Merciful Allah, make less noise!" the Israelite besought the revellers. "If a Muslim were to hear you, I am ruined."

At that Elias rose with dignity and swaggering towards the Jew with a Frankish elegance which the depth of his potations made unsteady, seized the landlord by the breast of his gaberdine. He lifted an admonishing finger, saying:

"You hold your row, Mr. Karlsberger. You go to Blazes, my fery good friend!"

The Jew, who knew no English, accepted the assurance and retired.

The musician struck into another tune, but soon desisted, finding his art forgotten in a general clamour of conversation, every one addressing the Frank, who, after looking from one to another at a loss, gave ear to Yuhanna Mahbûb, who sat next him. Yuhanna, like Elias, had partaken of the rum and gin. He struck a vein of amorous reminiscence, and began boasting of his conquests among English ladies. Abdullah sharply bade him hold his tongue.

"He is a boaster, sir, and neffer did nothing what he say he did," said that respectable man in explanation to the visitor. "If he really done such things, he neffer speak about them, that sure; he know he get the sack for such a shame."

"Shame!" chorused Elias with a reproachful shake of the head. "Hear, hear! Order, order! By God, you are a nasty beast, Yuhanna."

As he spoke he poured out rum into a tumbler, without looking, till the glass was half full.

Iskender, seeing the disgust in the Frank's face deepen, waxed exultant. It was time to leave now, while that look endured. He caught his uncle's eye. The old man nodded.

"It is time that we dispersed," he said in Arabic, "unless we wish to get wet through. See how the sky has clouded over while we sat here. Remember, it is the year's first rain, which means a deluge."

"He speaks truth"—"Rain is coming"—"See the clouds," cried one and another, peering out on the world. The company obeyed the motion of its acknowledged sheykh, all save Elias, who had got beyond the reach of all authority.

"You think I'm goin' yet, you silly ole fool!" he cried in English. "No dam' jolly fear! I haf not yet talk to my friend, this nice kind mister!"

And holding in one hand the glass half full of rum, he staggered to the sofa, till then sacred to the Emîr, and sank down on it with a contented hiccup.

"My dear luffed friend, now we talk a little. The rest, they go to Hell," he said; and tried to kiss the Frank.

He measured his length on the floor, the tumbler was broken, the rum spilt. In a moment the whole room was in an uproar. All who could get near enough tendered abject apologies to the guest for their companion's rudeness; while those debarred by concourse from that privilege, consoled themselves by kicking and punching the prostrate Elias, who wept aloud, still crying: "My friend! My dearest friend!" In the midst of this tumult, Khalil struck up the English National Hymn, a carefully reserved effect which he was unwilling to forgo.

At length the Emîr won his way to the door, where Iskender was waiting for him, too happy in the turn events had taken to shake his head or say "I told you so." They were joined by old Abdullah. Indoors, behind them, the shrieks of the Jew and his spouse were now heard high above the furious talking and the strains of the concertina.

"He come to you to-morrow, sir, and lie down on the floor and lick your boots; I'll see to that," said Abdullah with determination.

"Curse it all! I lost my temper!" said the Frank with a nervous laugh.

"We best make haste, sir," said Abdullah, pointing eastward.

The sky inland was black as ink and formless; the sand looked white as sun-bleached bone by contrast; the dark green wave of the orange-gardens appeared pale; a palm-tree in the distance stood up wan against the impending cloud. Presently a flash of lightning made them quicken step; big drops of water fell like bullets round them. Before they could reach the hotel the rain came down in sheets, beating up the sand like smoke, and they were drenched to the skin. The Emîr lent his henchman some dry clothes and insisted on his remaining till the storm passed over. Iskender knew that it might last for days. He dispatched a ragamuffin, who had sought shelter in the hotel entry, with a message to relieve his mother's mind; and soon found himself arrayed in clothes too large for him, sitting in a drawing-room only less luxurious than that of the Mission, looking at some English pictures, while the Frank wrote letters. Truly, it seemed, he had been born to honour.

CHAPTER VI

When Iskender rose next morning from the bed on the floor of the entrance-hall which he had been permitted to share with the black servant, he saw a woeful figure in the doorway. A man, wrapped in a great cloak of camel's hair, sat staring out dejectedly at the daylight, which was greenish grey, the whole air seeming turned to falling water. A hood drawn low upon his brow concealed his face, except the smouldering anguish of the eyes, when he turned at sound of movements in the hall behind him.

Elias—for he it was—sprang up and made the bound required to bring him within reach of his friend's hand, which he forthwith seized and carried to his lips, cringing low and moaning:

"O my horror! O my bitter shame! For the love of Allah, speak for me with his noble Highness! Thou knowest how I always loved thee, and stood thy friend when others scoffed at thee. Persuade thy Emîr to forgive me and keep silence, or I shall lose my employment, and my wife and little ones will come to want!"

Iskender's heart leapt up in thanks to Allah for thus abasing one who had conspired against him. He pressed the suppliant's hand in both his own.

"Now Allah witness how I always loved thee!" he murmured with a gaze of fond compassion. "It hurt my soul to see thee siding with my enemies, scheming to supplant me in the favour of my dear lord."

"By Allah, thy thoughts wrong me!" cried Elias with wild earnestness. "Ask Yuhanna, ask Khalil! My efforts were against them all, on thy behalf. How canst thou think such harm of one who loves thee?"

The speaker burst into a passion of tears.

"Weep not, O my dear!" Iskender murmured soothingly. "In sh' Allah, all may yet be well, though I will not disguise from thee that my lord is angry."

"Obtain but a hearing for me; that is all I ask. My tears shall wash his feet; my groans, my heartfelt penitence will surely move

him."

"Thou knowest that I will do all in my power to save thee. But, alas! my influence is not boundless. By naming thy name in his presence, and seeming anxious to excuse thy fault, I fear to draw a measure of his Honour's wrath upon myself. Last evening he was full of rage against thee, vowing to see thee a beggar in the gate of the town. And he has sworn at the first opportunity to make complaint of thy behaviour to the English consul."

At mention of the consul Elias collapsed utterly. He sank down on the marble pavement, huddled up in his cloak, his chin upon his breast, moaning like one insensible through stress of pain. Complaint to the consul meant his life-long ruin as a dragoman, since he depended on the English for his daily bread.

At length he cried:

"Thou must, thou shalt, befriend me! I adjure thee by Him who took our flesh upon Him, by the Holy Cross! Allah will reward thee, and I myself will be thy slave till death."

Pouncing once more upon Iskender's hand, he pressed two large coins down upon the open palm.

"What is this, O my soul?" cried the youth in amazement, after looking to make sure the coins were silver. "Are such things needed between me and thee?"

He pulled out his silver watch—the gift of the wife of the missionary, the excellent mother of George, which she had caused to be sent expressly from the land of the English—and gazed long and pensively at the face of it. Though he had risen later than his custom, deceived by the darkness of the rain prolonging night, it wanted still an hour of the Emîr's waking. He said:

"His Honour is still in his chamber; he objects to be disturbed while dressing. Nevertheless, since thy cause is urgent, I will crave an audience."

"Our Lord reward thee," sobbed Elias gratefully.

Iskender repaired to the hotel kitchen, and spent some minutes talking to the cook, who was his friend, before he returned and said:

"His Highness will not hear me. At mention of thy name he shut his ears." Then, when Elias burst into a fit of weeping that seemed like to strangle him, he added: "But he was in the act of bathing his whole body, which he does daily in cold water. It may be that the coldness of the water made him angry. After a little, I will try again."

"May Allah prolong thy life! From this day forth Elias is thy servant. I will give thee my gold ring with the large carbuncle, if thou bring this business to a good result."

After a decent interval, Iskender paid another visit to the kitchen and, returning, said:

"He gave no answer to my knock, and I feared to enrage him by repeated knocking. I will return presently."

Elias promised him a dagger of rare workmanship.

"He bade me go away, though not in anger," was the next report.

Elias promised him a pistol with jewelled mountings; and after that a saddle with rich tassels, a holy book, some silver buttons, and a young mare of the noblest desert breed. Thus time passed pleasantly, till the sons of Mûsa emerged from their sleeping apartment. Iskender dare not pursue the game with them about; but humbly presented Elias, explaining the reason of his presence. They at once offered themselves to plead the cause of the sufferer, who was a friend of theirs.

But the son of Yâcûb was beforehand with them. He sped straight to the bedroom of the Frank, who by good luck was up and dressed, and informed him of the penitence of Elias, begging forgiveness for that broken man. The Emîr consented with a laugh. Together they went down into the hall, where Iskender presented the suppliant to his Emîr, in the face of the sons of Mûsa, and of all the servants who came crowding to the sight.

Elias fell down flat before the great one and embraced his feet. He seemed unconscious when the Frank addressed him. It was by the exertions of the sons of Mûsa and the group of servants that the despairing wretch at length received assurance of forgiveness. With tears of joy he kissed the hand of his preserver; then, suddenly flinging open the vast cloak, which he had till now kept close around him, he revealed a splendid whip of rhinoceros-hide, mounted and ringed with silver. Iskender felt cruelly defrauded; it was with difficulty that he suppressed a cry of rage; for had he so much as guessed that such a thing was hid beneath the cloak of the blubberer, he would long ago have had it for his own. Elias thrust that whip upon the Frank, who would fain have refused it; but, the sons of Mûsa and the servants joining the donor in entreaties, he at last gave way.

When his patron went to breakfast, Iskender received many compliments. His manifest ascendancy over the mind of the

Englishman had made a favourable impression even on the sons of Mûsa. This was as it should be. But it did not please him, as the day wore on, to find that Elias, out of gratitude for his forgiveness, intended to remain in close attendance on the Emîr.

Divested of his cloak, his slim but manly figure cased in showy garments, his moustache curled ferociously up to the eyes, his fez tilted jauntily to one side, Elias appeared to Iskender's jealousy the most attractive of men. And as he recovered spirits, his talk showed the lively sparkle which enchanted travellers.

It being impossible to get out, the Emîr brought down a book, and read to them in the entrance-hall. The tale was one of wild adventures in the search for treasure. It fascinated Iskender. But Elias was reminded by one of the incidents of a lion he had slain upon Mount Sinai; and the Frank shut up the book to hear his story. Elias described all the fortunes of the fight with singular realism, opening his mouth very wide and roaring when momentarily impersonating the lion. The Frank showed great amusement; Iskender was vexed with him for encouraging the silly liar. He gave praise to Allah when Elias departed for the night.

But his bugbear returned next morning, as the Frank emerged from breakfast, claiming praise for his devotion in coming through such weather. The wady to the north of the town was now a raging torrent, he informed them. With his own eyes he had seen ten righteous men torn off their feet and carried clean away. More than a hundred camels had been swept far out to sea.

"He is a big liar, sir," Iskender whispered in the ear of his lord, who appeared unduly stricken by these tidings; and in proof of the assertion, he referred the matter to the sons of Mûsa, who said that a donkey laden with vegetables had been washed away. Elias, in no wise disconcerted, thanked God that things were no worse. But Iskender triumphed, informed by the Frank's sneer that he had struck a death-blow at his rival's influence. That done, he felt all kindness for the handsome dragoman, now his manifest inferior, and encouraged him to show off for the Emîr's amusement. He even, in the course of the day, assured his patron that Elias was not a bad man.

That evening the rain diminished sensibly; in the course of the night it ceased. The dawn next day was cloudless when Iskender set out early for his mother's house.

CHAPTER VII

"May Allah keep thee! Here is a nice to-do!" His mother, who had spied Iskender from afar, stood in a gap of the cactus hedge with arms akimbo. "Was ever woman blessed with such a son? The Father of Ice was here before the rain, he and the Sitt Jane with him. They spoke against thee ceaselessly for two hours, till my poor back ached with standing there and bowing, and my head swam round with listening to their tiresome iterations. Had I not heard it all before a thousand times—thy idleness, thy kissing the Sitt Hilda, thy choice of low companions in the town? And then thy friends—Elias, what a wretch! Once, years ago, when conducting a party of travellers, he pushed his horse among the ladies, who were on their donkeys. Unheard-of insolence! He shouted—actually shouted at English ladies—to make way; of course, they paid no heed to such impertinence, and then he rode among them. Ma sh' Allah! And Mîtri too! To hear them talk of Mîtri, any one would suppose the poor, good priest some dreadful ghoul. . . . All that was empty talk, however spiteful, and Allah knows I am well seasoned to it. But when they came to speak of thy Emîr, and swore to turn his mind against thee, I saw danger. What ailed thy wits that thou must needs tell Costantin a tale of thy going to the land of the English to study the art of painting at thy lord's expense? They have it that thou wouldst defraud the good young man.... Ah! Allah knows I have my fill of troubles."

She paused from sheer exhaustion, pressing a hand to her heart.

Iskender laughed at her concern, assuring her that his favour with the Emîr was now established past all fear of assault. Exultant from his recent triumphs, and flushed from a walk through air which the rain had left pure and invigorating, he did in truth believe himself beyond the grasp of adversity. His mother's woe seemed senseless. When he told of the wicked plot of the dragomans, and how signally it had failed through Allah's mercy, it angered him to see her wag her head with boding looks. She could not realise the victory his words implied.

"Think, O my mother!" he cried out impatiently. "These three days have I been his guest and chosen comrade, sitting with him at all hours—aye, even in the seat of honour in the guest-room, in my slippers—admitted to the secret of his every thought. It is well seen that he loves me truly. Give praise to Allah, therefore, and throw grief aside."

But his mother still looked rueful as she shuffled about the room getting food—a bowl of curds, some olives, and a slab of bread—to set before him.

"All that is well enough," she grumbled audibly, "but to what end? By Allah, I perceive no profit in it. Thy need is money, not mere compliments. Better get him to appoint thee monthly wages as his servant."

"Merciful Allah! is my mother mad?" exclaimed Iskender, teeth on edge with irritation. The woman's lack of understanding

rasped his soul. "He loves me as a friend, an equal, not a slave. And what are the paltry wages of a servant as compared with the friendship of a mighty prince? In the end he is certain to provide for me honourably; he will make me a great painter, as I said to Costantîn."

"In sh' Allah, it may prove so," replied his mother; "but I doubt it greatly. Thou wast ever one to follow distant dreams, neglecting the good that lay within hand's reach. Were Elias or Yuhanna in thy place, no doubt at all but they would make some money. There is a chance when making purchases or hiring horses for his Honour. But thou art capable of scorning every gain—nay, even of bestowing all thy goods!—for the sake of a fine friendship which may leave thee naked."

"By Allah, I will hear no more of this!" Iskender started to his feet, past patience. "Know that my love for my Emîr equals his love for me. He is my soul; how then should I defraud him? I shall buy for him as for myself; he shall admire my honesty—it is the virtue most esteemed among the Franks—and be assured that in the end he will reward it."

His mother sighed profoundly, and spread out her hands.

"Thou art young, O my son, nor hast thou my experience. It is true that the Franks hate guile or any cleverness; but I never heard of one of them rewarding honesty. For them it is a thing of course, unnoticed. I warrant thou wilt get no credit for it. Moreover, Allah knows thou needest money; for, if the missionary's wrath goes on increasing, I cannot keep thee here. I must either turn thee out or lose a good appointment which enables me to lay by something every year for thy future fortune. They grow to hate thee so that soon they will refuse to send their dirty garments to be washed where thou dost dwell. . . . Wouldst leave me now already, when I have not seen thee for three days? May thy house be destroyed! Stop, in the name of Allah; stop, I say! Was ever mother cursed with such a son?"

But by then Iskender had passed through the cactus hedge, and was running down into the sandy hollow. The clear, cool air at once restored his exultation, and his mother's words became a buzz of flies which he had left behind. The sky was dreamy blue; the sandhills rose against it shapely like the backs and flanks of couchant lions. The red roof of the Mission on its ridge seemed placed there by some childish whim—a thing incongruous. As Iskender fixed his gaze on it, he saw a figure coming thence with speed—a figure in dark Frankish clothes beneath the red tarbûsh, which he recognised as that of Asad son of Costantîn. A minute later he was called by name, and saw the same shape running fast towards him.

"O my soul!" cried Asad, panting, as he drew near. "What are these tidings that we hear of thee? Why wilt thou show thyself to disadvantage?" Pausing to gather breath, he caught Iskender's hand and pressed it to his heart. "What is this talk of thy friendship with the priest Mîtri? Wouldst thou for ever forfeit the goodwill of those above?" He jerked his head towards the Mission, hidden from where they stood by the brow of the sandhill. "Only think! To whom in all the land can we look for support and encouragement unless to these people who have brought us up? The Orthodox have neither wealth nor influence. Wert thou to join them, I fail to see how it could profit thee. In this land there is no hope for a Christian unless by foreign protection. And of all the races of foreigners the English are the richest and the most powerful. By Allah, thou wast a fool ever to anger them; thou shouldst have hid thy thoughts and bowed to their will in all things, even as I do. Thou seest they will make of me a priest, a grand khawâjah. They would have done the same for thee hadst thou behaved with common prudence. If not a priest, thou mayest still become a well-paid schoolmaster by their protection. Thou wouldst do well, therefore, to forsake this Mîtri, who has nothing to offer. Be advised, I entreat thee!"

Asad was a tall, lean youth, lantern-jawed, and of a serious countenance, in age a few months younger than Iskender. His complexion was swarthier than the common, and his eyes, like the eyes of his father Costantîn, were furtive, with a cast of malice. The boys had always been on friendly terms, in spite of standing jealousy between their parents. But to-day the patronage in Asad's speech incensed Iskender. What need had he, the Emîr's right-hand, of compassion and advice from any whipper-snapper? He replied with sarcasm:

"May Allah repay thy kindness, O my dear! Had I known thy mind had such anxiety on my account I should certainly have sent a messenger to reassure thee. Believe me, all thy fears for my welfare are quite groundless, for never had I such good cause to praise the Lord as at this present. Behold me in the road to wealth and honour, possessing the favour of an English nobleman, for whom these missionaries are mere specks of dirt. My kind lord vows that I have talent as a maker of likenesses, and wishes me to receive the best instruction in that art. For a beginning, he has sent express to the land of the English for better instruments and materials than I could here obtain. Indeed, there is no cause to fear for me. The praise to Allah!"

"Praise to Allah!" echoed Asad sneeringly, stung to reprisals by Iskender's tone. "But concerning that Emîr of thine I have a word to say. They have heard up there how thou hast fastened on him like a leech, and dost boast to all men that his wealth is thine. I myself heard the Father of Ice declare that thy designs were iniquitous and must be thwarted. He himself will go to the Emîr and tell him thy whole history, which is nothing good; so thou hadst best beware. By Allah, thou dost wrong to take this tone with me, who came as a friend to warn thee!"

"I thank thee," rejoined Iskender loftily. "But have no fear, I say again, for my Emîr esteems and loves me far too well to give ear to lying tales made up by mischief-makers. Moreover, he abhors the missionaries with such utter loathing that I think he would defile the beard of the Father of Ice did the poor wretch dare approach him. Thou supposest the missionaries to be all-powerful, as I did once. But, believe me, they are nothing thought of in their own land. My Emîr would hardly deign to notice things so low. Now I must leave thee, O my dear, for my lord awaits me."

He began the ascent of the sandhill.

"Well, remember I have warned thee!" shouted Asad after him.

Relieved of the irritant of the lank youth's voice and presence, Iskender felt dismay at his own boastfulness, and repented of it humbly before Allah. He knew that a jealous eye is fixed upon the heart of every man to mark when pride leaps up and straightway blight it. To show elation was to court calamity. However, he repeated divers formulas reputed potent to avert the evil; and when, from a high point of the dunes, he saw the minarets and the square roofs of the town standing forth clear and white with the blue sea for background, beyond the gardens freshened by the rain, he clean forgot misgivings.

CHAPTER VIII

The love Iskender bore to his Emîr transfigured every detail of familiar life. The walk to the hotel each morning was a joy through expectation, the return each evening a delight through memory. The vestibule in which he waited his lord's pleasure, with its marble pavement and its painted walls, a few cane chairs and tables, and a great clock ticking steadily, became the entrance-hall of paradise. Of nights the thought of sitting there next morning caused his pulse to quicken. The sons of Mûsa and the negro doorkeeper shared in the radiance of his loved one's neighbourhood. It was easier for his mind to pasture on accessories than to conjure up the Emîr's own presence, which left the memory blind as with excess of light. At times he would recall with a thrill the lofty brow with short fair hair reposing on its summit as lightly as tamarisks upon the crest of a dune, the laughing sea-blue eyes with golden lashes, or it might be the smooth curves of mouth and chin. But the face as a whole escaped him, though he never tired of studying it, and was always trying to produce its likeness; now with pencil upon paper, now with finger in the sand. No artist in the world could hope to show the beauty of that face as he beheld it, the glow its smile diffused through all his being. Even his mother's shrieks to him to get money from the Emîr enhanced his rapture, making his own pure love shine forth more brightly.

A week's fine weather followed on the rain. The Emîr rode out on horseback every day, with Iskender at his right hand, and Elias, who was a showy rider, circling round them. Iskender had told Elias plainly:

"The Emîr is mine. I found him; and shall keep him all my own."

"It is known he is thine," the elder had made answer with all deference. "Allah forbid that I should seem to rival thee! But his Honour has been merciful to me, and my soul is bound to him and thee in gratitude. Moreover, nowadays I have much spare time, which I can scarcely hope to spend more profitably than in the society and conversation of so exalted and refined a nobleman. He is thine and shall remain so. Only drive me not away!"

Iskender acceded to this petition the more readily that his Emîr, he could see, regarded the most exquisite of dragomans simply as a standing joke. They laughed together at his superstition and his boastfulness. But their butt was really serviceable in small ways, knowing where to hire good horses at the lowest price, and pointing out in the course of their rides objects of interest of the very existence of which Iskender had been ignorant.

Never had the son of Yâcûb known such happiness as he tasted in those rides across the plain which basked in sunshine, with violet mountains before them and a gleam of the sea behind. Here they traversed a mud-village plumed with palms, its narrow ways alive with dogs, and fowls, and children, where Iskender shouted, "Way for the Emîr!" till men and women bowed their heads and praised him; there an olive-grove profuse of dappled shade, where they were content to let their horses walk at ease. In their saddle-bags was much good food from the hotel, which they devoured at noon in some secluded spot; when Elias would discourse to them of strange vicissitudes, of beggars suddenly uplifted to the height of honour, and the Emîr, reclining lazily, would smile and wink privately at Iskender, who, at every such mark of preferment, longed to kiss his feet. No marvel yet related by Elias could compare with his own good fortune in Iskender's eyes.

One evening, on their return to the hotel, when two stable-boys were leading off the tired horses, and Iskender, with Elias, stood waiting to take leave of his kind lord, the negro brought a little card to the Emîr, who eyed it strangely.

"It is that missionary-man you hate so," he informed Iskender. "What in the name of Moses made him call on me?"

"Ha, ha! 'Name of Moses!'" laughed Elias, who was daily adding to his store of English idioms. "By gum, that's good!"

Iskender inwardly thanked Allah Most High for his mercy in directing the Father of Ice to call while the Emîr was out. He thought no more of it. They rode again the next day and the next; his happiness went on, unshadowed, till a certain morning when the Frank announced, with a yawn, that he supposed he must return the visit of the missionary. This he gave as a reason for not riding on that day. He would write off arrears of letters in the morning, and in the afternoon would walk out to the Mission.

Iskender's jaw fell. It had never occurred to him as even remotely possible that his Emîr would stoop to enter the abode of people he had always mentioned with such fine contempt. The picture of his loved one seated in the well-known drawing-room, an object of attention to the ladies, hobnobbing with the Father of Ice—his Emîr, whom he had come to regard as the very counterblast of that

house and all it stood for—gave him a sense of being upside down. The Frank laughed at his dismay, inquiring:

"Why so surprised? I must return the poor man's call in mere politeness."

"They hate me very much there," said Iskender miserably. "I fear they tell you things not true about me."

"I know the truth from you, don't I? Let them say what they like!"

Iskender went forth from his presence, pondering this reassurance, which contained no comfort for him, since he had given his lord to understand that he had received his education at the Mission as an independent paying pupil, and had quite concealed the fact that his mother was a washerwoman. The Emîr, if he thought at all of the matter, supposed him a youth of substance. How could he think otherwise, when he heard Iskender offer to defray the cost of horses, and saw him daily bring some present in his hand? Now he would learn the truth.

Elias was standing in the doorway talking to Daûd son of Mûsa when his friend came out. He noticed his glum looks, and asked the cause.

"My Emîr is going to visit that accursed missionary, who hates me and will work my ruin if he can."

"Why then remain a Brûtestânt among such enemies? Return to the Orthodox Church, and thou shalt find friends enough."

The mighty Daûd deigned for once a glance at Iskender. The house of Mûsa were fanatics in religion.

Elias took Iskender's hand and went out with him.

"The news is bad for me, too," he said ruefully, "for they hate me also—curse their religion!"

"What matter for thee? He is not thy Emîr. For me, it is the risk of life itself."

Iskender broke away from him at the first chance, and walked back to his home upon the sandhills. His mother screamed surprise at sight of him.

"My Emîr is busy," he explained, assuming cheerfulness as a good shield from questions, which might easily have probed too far into his cause for grief. For the same reason he forbore all mention of the purposed visit of his Emîr to the Mission. "I am free to-day, and so returned to see if I could help thee in the house."

Receiving his offer of help in sober earnest, she sent him presently upon an errand to the house of Costantîn; but on the way there, with the Mission full in sight, its red tiles glaring fiercely in the noon-day sun, it occurred to him that his Emîr would surely fall in love with the Sitt Hilda. Rent by the twofold anguish of the thought, he wandered aimless for an hour, and then returned, to gape at mention of an errand. His mother hurled a saucepan at his head.

"May thy house be destroyed!" she screamed. "Nay, go not now. It is too late! Within this minute I have seen Costantîn take the road to the town. O Lord, what have I done to be thus afflicted?"

Iskender then sat down before the threshold, and fell to drawing pictures in the sand, smoking cigarette after cigarette without contentment, till he knew by the shadow of the prickly-pears that the afternoon was well advanced; when he changed his position for one commanding the approach to the Mission, lit a fresh cigarette and began his watch.

"Thou dost smoke enough for twenty men!" his mother scolded. "Thou art always asking me for cash to buy the stuff, even now when thou hast thy Emîr! Take from him, he will be none the wiser. Thou hast no more intelligence than a sheep."

Iskender heard her not. He had caught sight of the figure of a Frank moving briskly along the ridge of the opposite dune. It seemed but a second ere it passed into the Mission, and was lost to sight. Iskender fell face downwards, making some idle play with the sand for his mother's benefit, while his heart went out in prayer to Allah. It seemed an age ere the Emîr came forth. From where he lay Iskender could not distinguish so much as the colour of his clothes, yet he fancied he could see his heart was sad or angry. Having watched him out of sight, he sprang up suddenly and strode off towards the Mission in the hope of news. As luck would have it he met Asad son of Costantîn.

"I was on my way to tell thee." That youth of promise grinned from ear to ear at the sudden encounter. He had to apply his mind for a minute to a stick of sugar-cane he was sucking before he could compose a countenance suitable to the bearer of ill tidings. "The Father of Ice—curse his father!—has done what I told thee he would do, has ruined thee with thy Emîr. He made thee out the lowest of the low, and told his Honour of thy boast that thou wouldst use his money as thy own, even to the extent of making him pay for thy education as a painter in the English schools. He told him it was wrong for him to ride on horseback beside one like thee—for whom to ride an ass were signal honour. Ah, I assure thee by Allah he has done it thoroughly. I have the story from the maid who carried tea to them. She listened by the door at my request, because I knew how nearly it concerned thee."

By way of consolation Asad offered to his friend a length of sugar-cane he had himself sucked three parts dry. It was accepted

blindly. Iskender knew not what he did or said. He wandered by the sea till it was dark, and then went home and passed a sleepless night in dreams of wealth, by which alone it seemed his love could be cleansed from all appearance of self-interest. Before his mother awoke in the morning he slipped out, and walked into the town, where he loitered down by the quay, kicking his heels, until it was time to present himself at the hotel and learn his fate.

"The khawâjah has announced his will to ride alone to-day, and for an hour only," said Selîm the son of Mûsa, who stood sunning himself in the doorway.

The words struck like bullets on Iskender's heart, they so cruelly confirmed the tale of Asad son of Costantîn.

Elias arrived, and asked him how he did. Iskender made known his tidings in a voice half-choked by grief.

"Was any word said against me?" asked the dragoman eagerly.

Iskender shook his head.

"The praise to Allah! Take heart, O my soul! If I am still in favour, I can plead for thee."

"Thou in his favour! Thou art nought to him!" replied Iskender with a sudden burst of spite.

Elias was about to answer angrily when the subject of their speech appeared. Both sprang to their feet expectantly. But the Emîr, with a blunt "Good-morning," passed them by and mounted the horse which stood in waiting before the door. They watched him ride away, then turned and gazed into each other's eyes. Both agreed that there was nothing for it but to sit down again and await further revelations of the will of Allah.

When the Emîr returned, after less than an hour's absence, his temper had improved, for he laughed at a joke of Elias, and suffered them both to accompany him to his room. Elias pushed home his advantage, telling a succession of funny stories in exaggerated broken English. The Emîr laughed heartily, and talked with him. Iskender, abashed by the uncertainty of finding favour, dared not risk a word; and his loved one never even looked at him.

"You come with me, sir, this afternoon. I show you sefral things you neffer seen!" said Elias, when the bell had rung for lunch.

The Emîr consented.

"You see, he hears me!" cried the dragoman with exultation, when he and Iskender were once more alone together. "Confide in me, and I will lead him back towards thee!"

The touch of patronage entombed Iskender. His Emîr, to be led to him by Elias! But "Weep not, O my soul!" the latter begged him. "Come with us this afternoon and I will bring thee forward."

CHAPTER IX

The son of Yâcûb longed to be alone and weep his fill, but could not leave Elias in possession. It was as a dumb and piteous plea against the usurpation of Elias, and not from any hope of reinstatement, that he attended the Emîr that afternoon, when the dragoman led them among the stinking alleys of the town, under archways and through private houses, pointing out sites of interest which Iskender felt sure were of his own invention; and he very soon wished that he had kept away. For Elias, according to his promise, "brought him forward," begging the Emîr to have compassion on him, because he was a good boy and devoted to his Honour's service. Iskender could only mutter, shamefaced, when the Frank addressed him.

"Why did you deceive me? I thought you were well off, or I should never have accepted all those presents. Now you must please accept a trifle from me."

Iskender found in his hand a piece of gold, and saw Elias nodding and grimacing. He murmured words of thanks perfunctorily, the while he gnashed his teeth with secret rage. Such kindness was an outrage to his love, being given at the bidding, in the presence, of the rogue Elias. The cup of his humiliation overflowed.

"Now all is well," Elias told him afterwards. "Be thankful that thou hast a friend like me. He smiled on thee; he gave thee money. Thou art back in favour."

Iskender was obliged to thank him kindly. What his soul needed was to be alone with his Emîr, to throw himself at his feet, and win his true forgiveness. The casual kind word with a fee was worse than nothing in the realm of love. But Elias, as if of fixed intent to thwart him, stood always in the way, annihilating the unhappy youth with condescension, bidding him cheer up and amuse his Honour.

Iskender heard his rattle with a stupid admiration which the Emîr's applauding laughter made quite envious. He himself had fallen to the level of a mere serving-lad, to run his Honour's errands and be tipped occasionally.

His mother judged that things were thriving with him, since he brought home money; and he did not undeceive her, wishing to keep his grievous fall a secret as long as possible; though soon, he feared, it must be evident to all the world. Already Yuhanna and the other dragomans jeered at him in the streets, acclaiming the triumph of Elias, their own comrade. He thought of invoking the aid of his uncle Abdullah, but that respectable man was for the moment absent on Cook's business. There seemed no hope of success by his own efforts, for in the presence of the Emîr he could not now think clearly, nor find a word to please. Distress of longing set a cloud upon his brow, a weight upon his tongue, which was not lightened when Elias chaffed him for a dull companion.

It was only when alone that he regained his normal wit; and then his soul leapt up in envy of the brilliant dragoman. Elias was clever; he had seen the world; his position as a dragoman would bear inspection. No wonder that the Frank preferred him to the son of a poor washerwoman, whose lowliness Elias himself was always emphasising. Thus attacked, and without defence, since there was no denying that his origin was humble, Iskender's pride took refuge in its old imaginings. Walking to the hotel, he would picture himself a king's son in disguise, or else the owner of enormous treasure; would smile, and clench his hands, and step exultantly; would think:

"If the Emîr but knew me as I really am!" But, approaching the Emîr, such fancies vanished. They were of no use because no one would believe them. It took Elias to give truth to wondrous stories by judiciously eschewing points that could be verified. Iskender, in great anguish, prayed to Allah to destroy Elias, or at least to teach His servant a true story, that he might outshine the miscreant. Dazzled by the triumph of that splendid liar, he thought of story-telling as the only way to the Emîr's good graces; and lay awake whole nights constructing fables which the first faint light of dawn showed to be worthless.

An appeal to the good nature of his rival failed irrevocably. When Iskender entreated to be left alone with his Emîr, were it but for five minutes, Elias stiffened, crying:

"Curse thy father! What means this plaintive whisper in my ear? Thy Emîr! He was thine by his own will, and has tired of thee. Now he is my Emîr. It is natural he should prefer the society of a grown man who has dwelt in England, and acquired the manner of its nobles, to that of a loutish, sullen boy, untravelled, ignorant! Behold, I have stood thy friend. But for me, he would have cast thee off entirely.... Leave thee alone with him? No, by Allah, that I will not—and have thee telling wicked lies against me."

Iskender turned away in great unhappiness, deeming his last hope gone.

That night he lay awake and thought of wealth as the only power that could confound his enemies. At last he fell asleep and dreamt of gold—nothing but gold; small rounded pebbles of it clothed the ground for miles. It was more, ten thousand times, than all the wealth of all the kingdoms put together. The sky above was black as pitch, though something told him that the hour was noon; the gold put out the sun. "All mine!" he thought, and was preparing to gather it, but some one stopped him with an iron hand; and then he woke, to hear his mother's snores and see the flicker of the night-light on the rafters.

His first sensations were of disappointment as though great wealth had really lain within his grasp. But presently as he pondered on the vision, his heart leapt up with exultation at the thought that here was the nucleus of a story, marvellous as any that Elias had related, and true, for who save Allah had surveyed the whole wide world, and could deny the existence somewhere of a plain all gold. Moreover, it would be a story after the Emîr's own heart, concerning, as it would, the search for treasure.

"If I say that I myself beheld the place, it will be false," thought Iskender to himself, "because I am young and every one knows that I have never travelled. But suppose I say my father saw it, then it will be true, for my father is dead and he travelled far in his day, and Allah alone knows what he saw or did not see."

The rest of that night was spent upon the story, considering in what manner it should be revealed, with what precautions and what vows of secrecy. As it shaped itself in his mind it seemed a fortune hardly less than that he had beheld in sleep. He rose at daybreak, thought-worn but light of heart. As it happened, that morning, his mother sent him to the Mission with a message concerning some mistake she had discovered in the tale of the last week's washing. He had to wait the pleasure of the ladies, to carry a message from them to his mother, and bring back her answer; so that it was past the usual hour when he reached the hotel. He met the Emîr and Elias going out together.

"His Excellency has graciously consented to honour with his presence an orange-garden which belongs to me," said the dragoman to Iskender in Arabic. "The weather is fine, like summer; the fruit ripens. It will be pleasant reclining in the shade."

The whole world swam before Iskender's eyes around the handsome figure of Elias, whose scarlet dust-cloak seemed a flame of fire. What was a plain of gold in the truest of stories to compare with an orange-garden actually existent close at hand? He had prepared to vanquish Elias in one sphere, and the coward leapt into another where he could not reach him. Never till now had he heard that Elias owned a garden. This was the end. Iskender resigned a contest so unequal. He heard the Emîr invite him to go with them, but shook his head, quite unable to articulate a reply. The despair of his mother, the hateful triumph of the missionaries, the derisive laughter of the dragomans, came before his mind. Some one, passing by, gave a chuckle. He sprang to self-consciousness with the impression that the whole world laughed. The doorway of the hotel was near. He fled through it, pretending that he had come to claim the sketching things he was wont to leave in charge of the doorkeeper. With those in his hands he hurried forth again, glad to escape the negro's friendly grin.

CHAPTER X

Half-blind with tears and rendered witless by despair, Iskender had walked half the distance to his mother's house before he realised that he had no desire to go there. A pool of shade by the roadside inviting, he sat down in it, and gave the rein to grief. It was with a mild surprise that, when his sense returned, he found himself under the ilex-tree before the little church which Mîtri served. Afraid of interruption he looked round uneasily. But no one was in sight, and he was loth to move. He opened his sketch-book for a suggestion of employment in case any one should espy him, and returned to sorrow.

From the group of hovels close at hand came women's voices and the cluck of hens; over his head, among the branches of the oak-tree, doves were cooing. The plumes of the two palm-trees hung dead still amid the sunshine! the shade in which he sat was quite unruffled. A train of camels sauntered by along the sandy road, with clanging bells, their driver chanting softly to himself. Iskender's heart went out in yearning to the peaceful scene. He envied the dwellers in those low mud-hovels, who led their simple lives with praise to Allah; envied the poor camel-driver singing in the sunshine as he jogged along. Alas for him, he had no part with these, but was a Protestant, a stranger in his native land, a monstrous creation of those English who had cast him off, a byword, a bad joke. The iridescent plumage of some pigeons, which, emboldened by his stillness, came strutting and pecking on the ground before him, drew his gaze; and, half-unconsciously, he began to trace their likeness on the page before him. While thus engaged he heard a stealthy tread behind him, and felt a breath on his neck as some one leaned above him to inspect his work. In a flash he remembered the beautiful child, the daughter of Mîtri, and his heart beat fiercely. The violent change of emotion paralysed him for some seconds; then he turned round suddenly and made a grab. The girl suppressed a scream, and tried to run, but he had caught her arm. With joyful eagerness, though the tears of despair were still wet on his face, he pleaded:

"Why wouldest fly from me, my soul? Why art thou here if not to talk with me?"

"The picture," she murmured angrily, pulling against him hard, with face averted.

"The picture is it? Only stay till it is finished, and I will give it thee with pleasure."

"No, no, I tell thee; let me go or I will tear thy eyes out! Art thou not a Brûtestânt, a dog? Thy touch is defilement. How canst thou continue in that lying faith? Art thou not scared each night at the thought of the devils and the eternal fires?"

She gave up resistance, and stood surveying him with great round eyes of horror, fascinated by the sight of a creature doomed to everlasting torment. The feel of her slight brown wrist was like a snake for coolness. Iskender ventured to caress it with his fingers. But at the touch she snatched it from him angrily, and sprang to a safe distance.

"Thou hast been weeping; why?" she asked with a cool directness, which was like a sword-thrust in Iskender's heart. His woe broke out afresh.

"O Lord!" he blubbered. "I have none to love me. My Emîr, whom I love truly, casts me off. The Brûtestânts, who brought me up, despise me. The Christians call me dog!"

"O man, stop crying, for it frightens me." Nesîbeh came again and leaned over him. "Be sure thy sorrow is from the hand of Allah to punish thy errors and disgust thee with them. My father says that calamities are often sent as warnings to the reprobate. Be thou warned, O my dear, and return to the Church. Then our Lord will be pleased with thee, and make men love thee."

"And thou—wilt thou too love me, or still call me dog?" Iskender seized her hand again, though she resisted furiously. But the words were cut in his mouth by a heavy hand which smote him sideways, deafening one ear; and when he recovered from sensations of a general earthquake, it was to find himself alone with Mîtri.

The priest stood smiling down on him with folded arms.

"What means this, O son of a dog?" he said through clenched teeth. "Dost thou take us, by chance, for Brûtestânts, for shameless heathens? Praise be to Allah, we are quite unused to Frankish manners. Respect our daughters as thou wouldest the daughters of the Muslim, or harm will come to thee."

At those words all his former misery returned upon Iskender. He buried his face in his sleeve.

The anger of the priest turned to astonishment. After staring for a minute, he sat down beside the youth and, putting his arm round his neck, inquired:

"What ails thee, O my dear? It cannot be that thou dost weep so bitterly because I struck thee, nor yet for penitence in the matter of my daughter. Such things afflict not thus the mind of youth. Come, tell me what it is! Open thy heart. Who knows but, in Allah's mercy, I may be of help to thee?"

Iskender lifted his eyes for one swift glance at his would-be consoler, then hid them once more in his hands. The expression of the priest's strong face commanded confidence, and he felt the need of a friend. After a second's hesitation, he confessed all: how he had deceived the Emîr at first as to his worldly station, how that deception had given the missionaries power to set his lord against him, and then how Elias, by unheard of perfidy, with diabolical arts, had taken possession of the Emîr, and prevented Iskender's obtaining the private audience which would have put things right.

The priest heard him to the end, then eyed him curiously.

"Allah is merciful!" he observed. "See what it is to be an infidel. Had this happened to me I should simply have turned away with a shrug and 'Praise to Allah.' But this youth has been taught to put his trust in worldly things, and when these fail, as fail they always do, he comes near to kill himself."

"I am no longer a Brûtestânt!" rejoined Iskender vehemently. "Allah knows I hate the race of them! But I have not yet told thee all my cause of grief—all the perfidy of the fiend Elias. It was bad enough when I supposed him poor like me. Now it seems he is the owner of an orange-garden. I knew it not until this morning. He has taken my Emîr away to feast there in the shade. How can I ever compete with a rich landowner?"

"I ask pardon of Allah! An orange-garden? Elias own an orange-garden? Never, in this low world! Now whither has he led the good khawâjah?" Mîtri laid a finger between his eyebrows, and thought deeply. Anon his face brightened. "If I give thee thy revenge upon Elias," he demanded, "wilt thou swear by the Incarnation to forsake the errors of the Brûtestânts, and come to me henceforth for instruction in the way of right?"

"I have done already with the Brûtestânts," replied Iskender, all alert in an instant at the suggestion of a bargain; "but as to joining the Orthodox, my mind is not yet clear."

"By the help of Allah, I will clear it for thee. Come and reason with me; that is all I ask. Swear to do this or I will not help thee."

Iskender swore with secret alacrity, having the girl Nesîbeh in his mind's eye.

"That is well. Now I think I know the trick that rogue is playing. I have seen him in the company of one Muhammad, who tends the orange-garden belonging to a member of our Church, the rich Azîz; and Azîz is gone these two days upon business to El Cuds. But his brother remains with us, praise to Allah, and it is but a step from here to go and warn him. I too have a debt against Elias, who invited me to bless his house, yet never paid me. So dry thy tears, my son, and come with me."

The priest went in among the hovels, while Iskender gathered up his sketching things, with hope revived. It being noon, the brother of Azîz was in his house. It was plain he did not share his brother's wealth, for his abode was of the humblest, and in dress and bearing he was a poor fellâh. His dark face brightened wonderfully when he heard what the priest required of him. He seized his staff and called out all the neighbours, who burst out laughing when they learned the nature of his business. When Iskender joined them, however, there were looks askance; one said to another, "Is not this the Brûtestânt, the son of Yâcûb? What hand has he in this affair? It were a sin for us to vex a true believer for the pleasure of a child of filthy dogs," till the priest cried, "Welcome him, for he accepts the truth," when all gave praise to Allah. One tall fellâh forthwith embraced Iskender, and began at once to tell him of the joys of Heaven.

The brother of Azîz then led the way down a narrow path among fruit-trees to his brother's garden, which was not far off. The crowd of neighbours followed. Arrived at the gate, he ordered the women and children to remain there, while himself and Mîtri, with six turbaned men all armed with big tough staves, crossed themselves devoutly, murmured "Bismillah," put the right foot first, and stole in very quietly.

Iskender followed at a distance, contrary to the command of Mîtri, who had bidden him wait without with the women and children, till he saw them stop and whisper together, when he struck off independently. Pressing his way through the dark foliage, hung with yellowing globes and sweet with the scent of orange-flowers, he reached a secret place whence he could watch what happened.

CHAPTER XI

On a carpet spread in the shade which fringed some open ground beside the sakieh, Elias and the Frank reclined at ease. Within hand's reach of them was placed a heap of oranges and sweet lemons, representing every variety which the garden produced; and between them reposed a tray on which were seen the remains of a choice repast. A creeper with a wealth of crimson flowers, wreathing a rough arbour built to shade the sakieh, contrasted the dark foliage of the fruit-trees. The sky was pure blue and cloudless. There was a hum of insects in the air. The man Muhammad, keeper of the garden, sat on his heels at a respectful distance from the feasters, watching for a signal to remove the tray. All at once this man sprang up, his mouth fell open. With a great oath he fled among the trees. Whereupon the brother of Azîz and his company threw off concealment, and came forward boldly with loud talk and laughter. Elias

gazed upon them, stupefied. Before he could get on his feet, they closed around him. Iskender heard the priest cry:

"Woe to him who withholds from the Church her dues!"

Mîtri, with the brother of Azîz, then paid respect to the Emîr, engaging his attention while Elias was being led away. Guided by the outcry of the prisoner, Iskender followed his captors on a parallel line among the orange-trees. He heard the howls of derision with which the women hailed the appearance of the boaster, and their demand that he should be well beaten to reward his impudence. Iskender drew close to them and peeped out through the leaves.

"Beat me? Nay, that you dare not!" cried Elias. "The lives of all of you would not suffice my vengeance. Wait, wait till I get hold of my good sword!"

"Thy sword, if thou hast one, is of wood, O braggart!" laughed one of his captors, at the same time giving him a shove which sent him reeling up against another of the band, who straight returned him.

"Nay, nay," he protested, in his passage through the air. "By Allah, I possess one, of the finest steel. Ask Mîtri, ask Iskender; they have seen it!"

Then, as they continued their rough game with him, he screamed out:

"Are you Christian men or devils thus to maltreat me on account of a few oranges for which I paid the guardian?"

"Nay, O beloved! Allah witness, it is not the oranges we begrudge thee, but the honour thou didst take unto thyself feloniously."

"Aha, thou art the owner of this place, and we thy servants!"

"Oranges! Let him have his fill of them!"

A woman snatched an orange from the nearest tree, and flung it full in his face. He opened his mouth to remonstrate, but another orange stopped it on the instant. With a fearful oath he gave up the argument, and ran for his life, amid a roar of laughter.

Then Iskender came out upon the pathway, and walked along it till he reached the sakieh. As prearranged with Mîtri, he feigned great surprise at sight of the Emîr, exclaiming:

"I thought you said the garden of Elias. This is the garden of Azîz abu Suleymân."

"Something queer has happened," said his patron, showing great uneasiness. "These people have been trying to explain to me, but I can't understand them."

Iskender looked to the priest for elucidation. After a short conference apart with him, he was in a position to inform his lord, who, learning the deception put on him, was very angry. His Honour was for leaving the place at once; but Mîtri and the brother of Azîz would not let him depart as if in dudgeon.

The little crowd of men, women, and children, having finished with Elias, now drew near, and sat or lay in a half circle at a respectful distance from the group upon the carpet. The brother of Azîz flung oranges to them; and both he and Mîtri asked for tidings of the boaster, which Iskender was called upon to translate for the Frank's behoof. The downfall of Elias seemed complete. But the victor could not take much joy in it, for the face of his Emîr still showed nothing but annoyance.

If only Mîtri and the rest would now retire, he thought impatiently, he might throw himself at the feet of his dear lord. As it was, he was forced to make his petition lamely, calmly, shorn of all that outward self-abasement which the case demanded. It was something, however, to be sure of privacy, to know himself alone with his Emîr in knowledge of the English tongue.

"Oh, sir," he faltered, "forgif me, do, or I shall die of grief. You 'f neffer been the same to me since goin' to the Mission. I luf you, sir, enough to gif my life. I thought you would hate me if you knew my mother was a washin'-woman! It break my heart efry time you gif me money; I luf to gif you things, not take things from you. If the missionaries tell you contrary, they're dam' liars. Elias thinks of money; but not me, because I luf you truly. I'll be a slave to you. Do please belief me!"

His lord was deeply moved. He said, "That's all right," and gave his hand to Iskender, who all at once beheld the beauty of the trees and sky, the wealth of crimson flowers above the sakieh. But when the suppliant pressed it to his lips, the Frank seemed angry, cried, "Don't be idiotic!" and glanced round him nervously.

"I luf you, sir!" pursued Iskender passionately. "By God, I neffer tell you lies again. You trust me, sir, and just be kind to me. It kills me when you luf that false Elias."

"Oh, that's all right," was the impatient answer. "I shall trust you for the future. Can't you talk of something else?"

Then it dawned upon Iskender that his Honour did not like this talk of love. At a loss, he changed his tone, but not the subject,

giving his patron the true history of his difference with the missionaries, which arose from his boyish passion for the Sitt Hilda.

"Is that the young one? Not a bad-looking girl, if she dressed properly!" threw in the Emîr; and again Iskender was at a loss, for he could not conceive how dress could do otherwise than hide a woman's beauty. He returned to his own case.

"I luf you, sir, and neffer, neffer will deceif you more."

"Oh, shut up, can't you?" said the Frank disgustedly; but presently, when they had taken leave of Mîtri and the brother of Azîz, he grasped Iskender's arm in friendly wise. As they strolled together down a sandy path among the gardens, whose dark rich green encroached upon a sky of living blue, the scent of orange-flowers pervading the still air, and the murmur of innumerable bees enforcing languor, Iskender walked in heaven.

"You trust me now, dear sir?"

"Yes, yes, I trust you. I shall never forgive Elias for that dirty trick."

"It is only just what I did always tell you. He is an imbutent fellow, and a most horrible liar," returned Iskender lightly, grudging Elias even his lord's anger.

A pause ensued. Iskender had no more to say, yet dreaded silence, recalling his uncle's advice to him to keep the Frank amused—advice which he had so lately seen confirmed in the case of Elias, the amusing talker. He knew that his patron's mind, unless engaged, was sure to revert to the adventure of the orange-garden, and recall his rival, of whom he wished to obliterate the very thought.

Then, of a sudden, while he racked his brain, he was seized with recollection of his vision of the night before. It returned to him from without, by no effort of his own; and was first announced to his consciousness by the sensation of a sudden flush from head to foot. Here was a subject able to engross the Emîr's whole interest, to the exclusion of Elias from his thoughts for ever.

"Sir," he said, "I wish to sbeak to you."

CHAPTER XII

The solemnity of Iskender's voice claimed grave attention. The Emîr recalled his gaze from far-off things, and fixed it upon the speaker with some awe.

Both stood stock still.

"If you please, sir, I think I tell you better sittin' down."

Iskender had espied a Muslin tomb among the leaves ahead, a small white cube, with egg-shaped dome atop of it, having in its shade a place for the repose of wayfarers. Thither he conducted the Emîr, and both sat down. Iskender toyed with his fingers in the crevices of its rough pavement. He wished to enjoy his love alone as long as possible; and the walk from thence to the hotel was but a short one. From a garden-hedge before them, two cypress-trees stood sharply out against the jewel sky.

"I wish to speak to you, sir, about something which I neffer told to anybody. My mother knows, but no one else. Will you promise, please, to keeb it secret, what I'm goin' to tell you?"

"Yes, rather! Fire away," said the Emîr.

"Well, sir, I know of a blace where gold is found more plenty than the oranges in that garden we now come from."

"You don't? You're joking!" The Emîr stared at him.

"I do, sir. You know, there's lots of country neffer been exblorede away there to the south and east, behind the Jordan. No one effer goes there. My father went there once—he was a muleteer and traffeled all about in those days—and in the desert, far away from any houses, he found a blace where bits of gold were lyin' on the ground quite thick like bubbles in a mountain wady."

"But your father was not rich," the Frank objected.

"No, sir; and just because he was not rich, he could not go again and fetch the gold. It wants horses and camels, and many men and arms to make afraid the Bedouins. My father saw that blace with his own eyes, and before he died he wrote a baber teach me how to get there. He told me he got a big biece of gold, enough to make him rich, but had to drob it after a bit, it was so heffy."

"How far is the place from here?"

"Nine days or ten, I think. When I get home I look in the baber which my father left and see for certain."

"But perhaps your father was mistaken, and the stuff he found was not gold at all."

"That might be." Iskender grasped his chin reflectively, admitting that he had not thought of that contingency. "But father was a knowing man," he added; "he looked close at things. Though he was only a boor common man, he had traffeled a great deal, and I think he'd know gold when he saw it."

"I must say I should like to go and see," exclaimed the Emîr, now warming to the subject.

"You'd better not, sir, till you make sure of protection. The desert beeble don't like strangers hangin' round. And the Guffernment would stab you, if they got to know. I thought I'd tell you, sir, because you're kindest friend I effer had. Then by-and-by you get some friends to join you, and go with a strong barty; and then, when you've got much gold, you think: Iskender made me a nice bresent. I hobe you think so. I know I am only a boor common man, like dirt to you. But I luff you truly, sir, and wish to gif you something."

"Don't talk such rubbish," said the Emîr impatiently. "Of course we should share alike, and go together, if at all. By Jove, it would be fun!" and he began to shadow forth the expedition, Iskender helping him with tempting details. To Iskender the vision of riding for days together alone with his beloved seemed all glorious. Sitting there beside the Muslim tomb, with the Emîr talking to him like a brother in the excitement of their common dream, he lost the thought of time, and was surprised to see the fires of evening in the sky, and the shadows of the two tall cypress-trees extending right across the sandy road.

"We must find out more about that place," said the Emîr with a great yawn as he rose and stretched himself. "We must make inquiries. Other people must at least have heard of it."

"Oh, sir, I beg you not!" the son of Yâcûb cried in sudden terror. "You bromised faithfully to keeb my secret!"

"Of course, you stupid!" came the laughing assurance. "We can make inquiries without telling any one."

At the door of the hotel they found Elias waiting. He stood forth and greeted the Emîr quite unabashed, convulsed with laughter at the latter's cold amazement.

"You thinkin' of that business in the garden? Neffer fear, sir! That was all a dam' bad joke of that briest-fellow, Mîtri—I'll be efen with him yet, by Jingo!—all to pay me out because I neffer gif him nothing when he bless my house. He is a funny man, sir—that briest is! He makes me laugh fit to sblit with his awful silly jokes."

Yet while thus joyously ascribing his late discomfiture to the Orthodox priest, his manner towards Iskender showed new deference, clearly indicating that he saw the young man's hand in the business, and recognised his master in guile. Iskender was greatly shocked when his Emîr allowed that proven rogue to enter with them. What was his horror when, arrived in the bedroom, his Highness lightly asked Elias if he had ever heard of a place in the interior where gold lay on the surface of the ground.

His lord shot a glance at Iskender to reassure him on the score of secrecy. But the poor youth gnashed his teeth and clenched his hands. He saw his credit hanging on a thread, his new-found favour on the point of leaving him, Elias avenged, triumphant. The dragoman had travelled far and wide; he was sure to ridicule the tale, and prove convincingly that no such place existed. He could hardly suppress a cry when Elias, instead of laughing, pulled a grave face and solemnly affirmed:

"I know it well."

"Have you been there?" inquired the Emîr, himself astonished. "I heard of it to-day by chance, and am curious to know the whole story of it."

"Not I myself. But I know one man what went there. He left this bart of the country, though; may be dead, by Jofe, for what I know!"

Interrogated further, Elias declared that the name of the place was well known. It was Wady 'l Mulûk, the Valley of the Kings; though why he could not say, unless it were because the kings of old, who were certainly richer than kings are nowadays, derived their gold from thence. Many persons had, at divers times, set out to find that place; but few had reached it, for the reason that no one knew the road exactly, and the desert tribes were fond of killing travellers.

"Don't you make no mistake!" he concluded. "The Wady 'l Mulûk, he's there all right, only a job to find him. If you want to hear about him, I tell you what, dear sir, I ask some beeblees."

"I should be obliged if you would," said the Frank.

Iskender was still in the stupefied state of one who wakes to find his dream made real. After such evidence from Elias, an unprepared, impartial person, there was no longer any room for doubt but that the gold of his vision actually existed. He felt a trifle jealous of the witness for knowing more about it than he did himself. A servant summoning the Emîr to dinner, he went out into the twilight with Elias, who still treated him with the gravest deference. As they walked away together, the dragoman still talking of the wonders of the place of gold, Iskender could not help informing him that he had certain knowledge of the whereabouts of that valley, away in the eastern wilderness, beyond the Jordan.

"Thou sayest? Now may Allah bless thee!" muttered Elias, with immediate reverence. "Allah witness how I always loved thee. I understand now why his Honour questioned me with so much mystery. You are going there together. The Emîr will furnish forth the expedition and become thy partner. Allah witness how I always loved thee. Bitterly do I repent my conduct towards thee of the last few days, and Allah knows thou hast had ample vengeance. Thou art too strong for me. Henceforth I am thy friend and loving servant. Take me also, I beseech thee, O my soul. I can be useful to thee from my wide experience in travel; and of the spoil I would claim no more than an alms or gleaning. Fear not that I shall breathe a word to any man. Elias is renowned for his discretion. Say yes, O beloved! For the love of Allah, let me go with you."

Iskender said yes, though with mental reservations. The concession set Elias upon heights of glory. He kissed Iskender on both cheeks at parting, and swore by Allah that the love he felt for him transcended that which he bore his own father and mother.

CHAPTER XIII

Iskender followed the sandy road through the gardens. It was dark, and the forms of one or two men who passed him made him tremble, they sprang so suddenly out of the gloom, noiseless, their footfalls deadened by the soft sand. The events of the day had left on him a strong impression of the supernatural, and now he felt that witchcraft was abroad, expected each minute that some evil claw would pounce on him out of the gloom. The very stars of heaven looked uncanny. Cold sweat came out upon his forehead; his legs dragged weakly though he longed to run. Two palm-trees standing out against the sky told him he was approaching the abode of Mîtri; the church, the hovels, even the ilex-tree, were swallowed up in the dark cloud of the gardens which rolled mysterious on every side. Presently he saw a light among the dwellings. It occurred to him to call at the priest's house, and render thanks for his intervention in the matter of Elias. He longed to speak to some one, any one, for rescue from the grinning terror of the night.

He knocked at the door with loud blessings. It was opened, with a sudden gush of light. The priest peered out into the gloom.

"Is it thou, O my son?" he cried, recognising at length the voice that praised his kindness. "No, Allah be my witness, I will accept nothing from thee—neither thanks nor anything else, save thy conversion. Hast come to seek instruction in accordance with thy promise? Alas! I cannot bid thee enter, for my wife and children are abed; the hour is late. What ails thee that thou tremblest? Art afraid of the powers of darkness, poor Brûtestânt without a saint to guard thee? Wait, I will take my staff and bear thee company.

"By Allah, thou hast every cause to fear," he continued, stepping forth beside Iskender. "Thy errors give the devils power to harm thee. The Franks are not afraid; for in each one of them there sits a devil far more powerful than those outside. But thou, poor innocent dupe, are left defenceless. Surely the falsehood of their teaching must be evident to a youth of thy intelligence?"

"Nay, O my father, though my soul abhors them, I still discern much good in their beliefs." Iskender, freed from fear, could argue lightly. That morning, when he gave his word to Mîtri, he had felt alone and helpless. Now, in repossession of his Emîr, with boundless wealth in prospect, the question of his change of faith seemed unimportant. That the Orthodox creed was the way of salvation, he had no doubt; his mother had always said so; but there seemed plenty of time in which to save his soul. He added: "How can their faith be false, seeing it is founded on the Holy Scriptures?"

"They quote the Scriptures, it is true," retorted Mîtri, "but without rule or guidance, each in the pride of his own understanding—the devils do the same!—so that no two Brûtestânts believe alike. They reject all those sacred traditions which lead back to Christ. Their only union is in hatred of the Church. They exist for themselves alone, to the hurt of others, just like stinging insects. And Allah alone knows why they were ever created, unless it be as a kind of hornet to molest the faithful. Consider, O my dear, how transient this life is; its prosperity departs with the breath. Think on the anguish of those who, attracted by the wealth and luxury of these missionaries, forsake the truth of God, when they stand before His Throne of Judgment at the Last Day!"

Iskender listened, but was unimpressed. His mind had wandered back to the events of the day; and at that moment Wady 'l Mulûk was more apparent to his mind than the Last Judgment. He murmured:

"I will ponder what thou sayest."

"Again bethink thee, thou who hast the gift of making likenesses and colouring them so that they resemble living things, what fame awaits thee as a maker of sacred pictures for our churches and our dwellings!"

"True, I must think of that," replied Iskender. He meant, in case he failed by any chance to find the valley full of gold, whose wealth would raise him to the social rank of his Emîr.

"Well, go in peace, my son; may Allah guide thee!"

With the blessing Mitti [Transcriber's note: Mîtri?] kissed Iskender on the brow, and pressed his hand. They were then quite near the little house upon the sandhill; could see light streaming from its open door and, silhouetted on the light, Iskender's mother looking out for him.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, when her son came bounding through a gap of the cactus hedge. "Praise be to Allah thou art still alive and well! I have kept a bowl of lentils hot for thee, which is more than thy deserts, O shameless one! O my despair, ever to have borne such a son! When—when wilt thou learn discretion? Why didst thou express a hope that thy Emîr would foul the beard of the Father of Ice, and that in the hearing of the son of Costantin? Here have the ladies been again to-day, railing against thee as the worst of malefactors. By Allah, I can keep thee here no longer. Yet whither canst thou go, unhappy boy, for now I learn that thou hast angered thy Emîr? Thy uncle, the respectable Abdullah, has been here in great trouble for thee. He has this day returned from Beyrût, that great, splendid city, and I thought that he had come to tell me of its progress and high fashion. But no, it was for thee he came. In the town, on landing he had heard the tidings of thy downfall. Why hast thou hid the truth from me these many days? I could have fallen lifeless when I heard him say that thou art nothing, that Elias is the friend of thy Emîr. Whence came that money thou didst show me? Was it stolen? Tell me, O unfortunate! I am thy loving mother, and shall not condemn thee."

Iskender laughed at her concern.

"It is true," he said, "that my Emîr did for a time prefer Elias. But now, praise to Allah, all is well again!" And he proceeded to relate what had happened that morning in the orange-garden.

"May Allah reward our father Mîtri!" his mother exclaimed. "But I would not have thee go too far in friendship with him, on account of the missionaries, who may yet forgive thee. To-day when I condemned thy conduct fiercely, their hearts, I could see, were touched with pity for thee. Now if I drive thee forth, and vow never more to look on thee, there is a chance they will forgive thee quite. It is certain that they do not love Asad as they loved thee. By Allah, I should like to see my son a mighty clergyman. Then I would wear fine Frankish hats in their despite; and thou couldst wed the Sitt Hilda, though she is old for thee. To-morrow, therefore, seek some new abode.... Allah cut short thy life! Thy wits are wandering. Is the matter of my speech so light, O misbegotten?"

Iskender, who was half-way through the mess of lentils, protested with his mouth full that he had heard and would obey. But his tone was so indifferent as to increase his parent's wrath. To one deep in thought of the valley of gold, her words seemed trash. She stormed unceasingly till they had both lain down to rest and the night-light was burning fitfully on the ground between them. Then at last came peace; she snored aloud; while Iskender thought of the valley full of gold, whose true existence had been miraculously

revealed to him, and then of the career as a church painter offered to him by the priest Mîtri. Anything was better than to be the fatted slave of the missionaries, who, he felt sure, hated him. His desire was to be loved.

In the morning early he returned to the house of Mîtri. As he reached it a noise of chanting in the little church informed him that the priest was at his duties; so he squatted down in the shade of the ever-green oak, and waited till the service should be ended. Presently a group of brown-legged boys came tumbling out, smiting one another and shouting the minute they had passed the threshold. A few girls followed, all discreetly veiled, in one of whom he recognised Nesîbeh; and then some older people, turbaned men and white-veiled women, among them one blind sheykh with hands outstretched; and finally, after an interval, the priest himself. Iskender sprang to him, and kissed his hand.

"I seek a boon of thee, O lord of kindness!"

"In the name of Allah!" Mîtri seized the suppliant's hands and pressed them to his heart. "Say on; I listen."

Iskender told him how the hatred of the missionaries had reached such a pitch that his mother was obliged to cast him out. He had come to the priest, his best friend, for advice in this dilemma, thinking that he might recommend him to a lodging.

"Now may Allah house thee!" said Mîtri with a thoughtful frown. "Allah knows thy mother does great wrong thus to cast thee abroad, a young unmarried man; unless she wishes to debauch thee utterly. For who but the worst of characters would take thee in, to share the intimacy of their wives and daughters, except it might be as a traveller, and for a single night? Wallah, I am at a loss how to advise thee. There is not at present among us an old childless couple, nor yet a bachelor, whose dwelling thou couldst share. By the Holy Gospel, I see no resort for thee except a khan.... I have it!"—his perplexity was lightened suddenly, and he raised his eyes, till then downcast. "Thou shalt lodge at the hotel of Mûsa el Barûdi, where thy patron dwells. Mûsa is of my congregation, and he loves me well; while, as for Selîm and Daûd, his two sons, I taught them their duties and chastised their youthful conduct. Wait here, and I will write a word to them, how thou art tired of the vain beliefs of the Brûtestâns, and wouldst tread the path of Salvation."

"Write all that pleases thee, our father!"

Iskender waited to receive the missive; and then, with blessings on the priest and all belonging to him, sped with it to the hotel. To be near his sweet Emîr both night and day fulfilled his dearest wish.

The sons of Mûsa had not yet risen when he entered the hall; and the black doorkeeper, accustomed to see him come in every day without leave or question, betrayed astonishment when asked to bear a letter to them.

"To which of the twain?" he asked, with a dubious grin.

"By Allah, that I care not; for see, by the superscription, the message is to both alike."

"I will show it to the Khawâjah Selîm," the negro muttered, and went off, holding the paper wrapped in his white robe.

He returned almost immediately, on his heels Selîm the son of Mûsa, who cried gladly:

"Thou art welcome and thrice welcome, O my dear! The praise to Allah, and good luck to thee! Our father Mîtri must be mad with joy; for thou art the first that ever came from them to him, while they have stolen many from his flock, though not of late. The Holy Orthodox Church invites no proselyte, so the more credit to the man who comes to her. She resembles some old-fashioned, quiet merchant, too dignified to compete with Frankish cheapjacks. Our house is thy house; dwell here as long as is convenient to thee, and may Allah preserve thee always."

Iskender murmured his thanks, standing reverently, with hands folded away and eyes downcast. Then, when Selîm had gone back to his dressing, he crossed his legs upon the pavement of the hall and mused on his good fortune, praising Allah.

Elias came into the hall and greeted him.

"I have news for thee," he whispered; and Iskender, remembering the Valley of the Kings, gave eager ear; but just then Selîm, the son of Mûsa, called from an inner room:

"Iskender is a convert, O Elias. He returns to the bosom of the Church. The praise to Allah!"

"Is it true?" cried Elias, starting back and staring at the youth. Perceiving no denial, he embraced him fondly, crying: "Our Lord bless thee! Allah knows I always loved the soul of thee, though the Brûtestânt stank in my nose; now from this day forth I am thy brother. By the Most High, thou shalt lodge nowhere but in my house."

"May Allah reward thy hospitality, O Elias," cried again the son of Mûsa. "The honour thou wouldst have is mine already."

"A pity!" sighed Elias, seeming really disappointed.

But the next minute, hearing steps upon the stairs, he brightened up, and said in Iskender's ear:

"The Emîr descends! Ah, I assure thee by the Holy Gospel, I have news for both of you."

The Frank stayed only long enough for salutations, then passed again from sight, going to breakfast. But though they were long alone, without a listener, Elias refused to impart the matter of his news, bidding Iskender wait till the Emîr gave audience.

"Ah, I assure thee, news of price!" he repeated, hugging himself, with big round eyes of mystery.

CHAPTER XIV

The news, when Elias did at last reveal it, was simply another of his wondrous stories. The Frank, however, listened to it with some interest as the three walked out together.

In the watches of the night Elias had remembered how years ago a muleteer, by name Mansur, had brought a piece of gold to show him secretly. This man had been upon a journey to the Wady Mûsa with some English gentlemen of the kind who seek adventure in wild places. Out in the desert, far away from any house, he had the misfortune to be separated from his company, and wandered alone for three days in vain attempts to rejoin them. At dusk one evening he found himself in a wild ravine, its cliff-walls honeycombed with caves, in one of which he chose to pass the night. No sooner had he lain down than he imagined that he heard unearthly music; but by dint of repeating the name of Allah the trouble left him, and he went to sleep.

In the middle of the night he woke with a start, to find the cavern lighted up, and full of people talking angrily. By their pointed ears, domed heads, and slanting eyes he knew them for the dwellers underground. Fear paralysed and kept him silent; which was lucky, for he learnt presently that their wrath concerned him. They were there, it seemed, to guard a treasure-ground against intruders; and were debating in what manner they should kill him, when Mansur, who was a Christian, lifted up his voice and cried:

"In the name of Allah, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!" They vanished instantly with horrid yells.

In the morning, when Mansur arose and went to the cave-mouth, he saw that the bottom of the ravine was strewn with lumps of gold. In delight he ran and gathered of the stuff as much as his bags would hold, and then set forth. But he had forgotten to give thanks to Allah for the burden; and in consequence of the omission it was not made light to him. For relief he was forced to thrust a hand into his placket, to pull out lump after lump and drop it on the road, till there remained but one piece, small as compared with the rest, but still enough to make his fortune in the world of common men.

Allah blessed his journey, and he reached his home at last. There, after a consultation with his wife, he resolved to submit the nugget to some man renowned for probity and wisdom. He brought it, therefore, to Elias, who believed it to be gold, but, loth to trust his judgment, advised Mansur to show it to a certain jeweller of high repute, as well for virtue as for craftsmanship; and Mansur did so. The jeweller asked Mansur to leave it with him for a day or two, that he might apply certain tests, and when asked for a receipt, appeared so hurt, called so loudly upon Allah and the neighbourhood to attest his honesty, and in all respects bore himself so nobly, that Mansur retired convinced that he had left his treasure in clean hands.

But when he returned after two days, that jeweller informed him that it was not gold. Mansur then asked for it to be returned, saying that if it were only brass it would be worth preserving. The merchant replied that he had thrown it away, and told the muleteer to go and hunt for it upon the rubbish-heaps outside the city gate. Mansur then called him thief. The jeweller cried "Ya Muslimin!" and roused the neighbours, who fell upon Mansur, and beat him soundly, leaving him for dead. But before he lost consciousness he heard the jeweller exhorting the multitude not to spare him, for that he had stolen a lump of fine gold from the Sultan's treasury.

"What you think of that?" said Elias, when he had made an end.

"A truly wonderful story," rejoined the Emîr.

Their walk had ended on the sea-beach, where they now, all three, lay stretched upon the sand. The Emîr, with his straw hat tipped over his eyes, threw a stone from time to time into the azure ripples, as dark in contrast with their foam as ink on paper. There was a moment's silence. Iskender whispered in his lord's ear:

"It is all a lie. He made it up last night."

"There may be some truth in it; you never know!" replied the Emîr in the same tone. He added aloud for Elias, who was staring fixedly out on the sea, still entranced by the vision he had just related:

"If the place is guarded by nothing more terrible than your genis, I should like to go there."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Elias. "That's all tommy-rot about the jinnis." Nevertheless he glanced around in haste, and muttered an exorcist formula beneath his breath. "The Bedouins they're more real to be afraid of. But neffer say die; you square them easy with a

few dollars. Iskender, he know the way there, so all serene!"

"I told Elias all about it, sir, last night," said Iskender sheepishly, in reply to a glance of surprise.

"Yes, sir, he tell me, and I'm goin' to helb you all I can. Trust Elias, sir, he knows his way about!"

"Well," said the Emîr after a little meditation, "I feel inclined for the adventure, provided always that it doesn't cost too much."

"We soon see what that's a-going to cost."

In a trice Elias whipped out from his breast a greasy pocket-book, stuffed with testimonials from travellers, which, by the violence of their owner's haste to begin calculations, were scattered on the sand. As there was no wind, Elias let them lie there for the present, and holding the pocket-book close to his nose, fell to dotting down Arabic numerals on the tablet allotted to memoranda.

Iskender glared at him. The wretch who yesterday had been crushed and all-submissive, to-day aspired to take command of an expedition the very idea of which was all Iskender's.

"This was gif me by one American gentleman," Elias remarked of the pocket-book. "Well, come along then! You take camels or mules? Camels hold the most, but mules much nicer. We say fifty mules. Then you want a cook, and a waiter, and 'bout ten muleteers, and five—six big tents. I think you do it easy, grub an' all, sir, for 'bout five hundred bound."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the Emîr.

"Well, I do it for less, much less, but you be uncomfortable."

Iskender, then awaking from his trance of horror, grasped the dragoman's arm and shook it angrily.

"What do we want with fifty mules, O ass?" he asked in Arabic. "One mule would carry enough to make us all as rich as Mûsa el Barûdi."

"By Allah, thou art an ass thyself! Is it not well to bring away the most we can," returned the visionary, sore dismayed; when, seeing how their talk apart made the Frank suspicious, he relapsed into English with a genial smile:

"Yes, fifty too dam' many; we take ten. A friend of mine got three nice tents—a bit old, but neffer mind! He let you haf 'em cheab, because he luf me. Then three horses for you and me and 'Skender. How far you say it is?" He turned to Iskender. "You know the way."

"About nine days from here, accordin' to the baber which my father wrote. My mother kebt it to this day."

"Well, sir, I think you get there under one hundred bound, and once you got the gold you not care a dam' what it coss comin' back."

"No," said the Frank firmly. "I want to know the expenses there and back, and I can't afford more than fifty pounds for the whole expedition."

At this unlooked-for ultimatum Elias opened his eyes very wide and sucked his pencil, staring ruefully at his scattered testimonials. He declared it to be "no go."

But Iskender, seeing the opportunity for self-assertion, stood by the Frank, undertaking recklessly to arrange the whole expedition, on a smaller scale, for the sum stipulated.

Elias shrugged to the ears.

"Be careful to keep this secret," he said sullenly in Arabic. "By Allah, if the others, who dislike thee already, get to know of it, they will go mad with rage and probably take thy life. Abdullah, thy uncle, himself would wish to slay thee. For a missionary or a resident in the country, and out of season, it might pass. But this is a lord of wealth, a prince, the best sort of traveller!"

"Canst thou not perceive, O my dear, that the desire of his Honour is for rough adventure, and not luxury? And verily, to travel in the style of thy proposal would simply be to invite every bravo of the wilds to come and rob us."

This Iskender uttered in a tone of high impatience, and he was pleased to observe, out of the corners of his eyes, that his patron approved of that tone being used towards one who had designed to overcharge him.

"Well, Allah reward thee; for thou canst make no profit on it, that is certain," said Elias with another shrug, and after that kept silence for some minutes, resigning all part in the discussion. But soon, as that discussion grew more animated, and the vision of the sea of gold came dazzlingly before his eyes, he forgot his dudgeon and chimed in once more, thus tacitly accepting the leadership of Iskender, who was satisfied.

"When shall we start?" asked the Emîr at last.

"Wheneffer you blease, dear sir," replied Iskender.

But Elias thought profoundly, visibly, with finger laid to brow.

"I think you better wait a bit, Iskender," he said presently. "I tell you why. Just now there's no trafellers comin' to the country, so the dragomans just stand around and jolly well watch all what you do. We go now, it make a talk. Wait a month or two, in the name o' Moses, then there's lots o' trafellers; they think about makin' money, and go hang! I shan't want no trafellers this year. No jolly fear, by George! I stick to you. Like that they think you got a brober dragoman and all serene!"

This was sound advice, and, as it was proffered with the right humility, Iskender commended it to his beloved.

CHAPTER XV

On the day following that council on the sea-beach, something happened which pushed the Valley of the Kings into the background for a time. This was the arrival from the land of the English of a fine new paint-box, which the Emîr presented to his henchman with most gracious words. With this beside him and his sketch-book on his knees Iskender heard the talk around him with but half an ear, and, when referred to answered without thinking, thus assenting to propositions and accepting responsibilities the onus of which dismayed him when he came to realise it. For instance Elias earnestly desired to know if Iskender could have included the services of a first-rate cook in his estimate for the expedition. The best of cooks, he vowed, was necessary for the honour and contentment of their dearest lord. How was it to be done?

Iskender with eyes intent upon a spot of colour newly laid, with brush in air, replied:

"Have no fear, O beloved. I shall find a man; and, if not, I myself will do the cooking."

"But canst thou?"

"By Allah, I am a known professor of the art." And again when Elias spoke of other services certain to be required upon the journey, Iskender undertook, in default of trained servants, himself to make the bed and wait upon the Frank at table.

The Emîr was greatly pleased by this alacrity of the absorbed artist; seeing which, Elias cried:

"No, no, by God, you can't do all the work, I help you, 'Skender. Let me wait at table."

Iskender saw Elias waiting on their lord alone, breathing his pleasure in the great man's ear! Yet he assented gratefully. Elias was not to go with them at all, he had firmly resolved; but there was no need to tell him so just now, in this time of preparation when his experience was sure to be useful. In Iskender's mind the Valley of the Kings was little more than a romantic pretext for a ride alone with his Emîr. But Elias thought of nothing but the gold. His eyes seemed to have grown larger in these days, and were fixed wide open to contain the vision. He treated Iskender with a kind of worship as the repository of that precious secret, showed great care for his health, and was in all things his loyal helper. But the young man did not trust him. He kept the details of the expedition to himself as organiser; and, though Elias pestered him with questions concerning the whereabouts of that desirable valley, he would reveal nothing. By dint of thus withholding information, he himself acquired the firm conviction that there was really information to withhold.

It was not till more than a week after the coming of the famous paint-box that Iskender found time to go again to the house of Mîtri. Repairing thither in the glow of a fine evening, following a rainy day, he was surprised, as he drew near the place, to see his mother talking with Mîtri in the doorway. She was wrapped from head to foot in a great shawl, and seemed in some trepidation, casting frequent glances up and down the road. In so doing she caught sight of Iskender, and raised hands to heaven. She ran to meet him.

"What is this?" she cried. "Day after day have I been here to seek thee, because the whole world says that thou hast joined the Orthodox, and my heart yearned towards thee; but I dared not go openly to the hotel where thou art known to lodge, having sworn to the missionaries that I would never see thee more. Here, too, I am in terror of my life, for if it were known that I held intercourse with Mîtri, they would cast me off. Well, thou hast no more hope from them, thanks to thy rashness. Why couldst thou not shun the priest here, as I told thee to? Now, with all the Orthodox boasting of thy conversion, thou art more than ever accursed in their sight. Even at me they look askance, I fancy, as if I had a finger in the mess. Come indoors where we can talk privately. The worthy priest will let me enter with thee. What made thee go and change thy faith just now?"

"I have not yet changed it, O my mother. I do but hear the reasoning of our father Mîtri."

"Well, that is something. I will tell them that." She held her tongue suddenly, finding herself within the hearing of Mîtri, who, however, took no notice of her, but welcomed Iskender fatherly and bade him enter. She entered with them unrebuted, and sat by while they argued, feasting her eyes upon her son's good looks. The girl Nesîbeh came occasionally to the door of the inner room, and

exchanged mischievous glances with Iskender, who was on the watch for her. His mother's eyes were quick to notice this, and, leaning to his ear, she whispered:

"Cunning devil! Thy plan is not amiss, for she is comely, and her father stands well with the highest in the land. Thou wilt mix with the Barûdis and the rich Azîz."

Iskender shook her hand from off his arm, and brushed her words away as stinging insects, in terror lest the priest should overhear. The priest rebuked her for the interruption. But she continued unabashed, and sat on smiling to herself, and nodding at Iskender when she caught his eye.

After that Iskender went to the priest's house every evening, and his mother often stole so far to meet him, hurrying, chin on shoulder, in evident terror of pursuit by the missionaries. She endured all Mîtri's reprobations with a shrug, content so long as he allowed her to embrace her boy.

"Poor people must eat bread. Our Blessed Lord knows that and will make allowance for me," was her reply to the accusation of hypocrisy. But she now seconded Mîtri's designs upon Iskender, gratified by the notion of an alliance with the priest's family. "It is different with him," she admitted, "since they have cast him out. Let Iskender follow the guidance of the Spirit. Doubtless the congregation will take care of his future, for he has forfeited a great career for conscience' sake."

Iskender, however, still held back, from no conscientious reluctance, but merely to prolong a hesitation which he found delicious as giving him value in the eyes of the girl Nesîbeh. Her delight when any of his objections went down before her father's reasoning and the triumphant private glance she shot at him made a joy not lightly to be forgone. When all his veritable doubts had been demolished, he invented others to prolong this happiness. He cherished definite hopes, dream-like as was the nature of his mental process, of obtaining her for his own, when he returned full of treasure from Wady 'l Mulûk. The big priest, it was clear, had conceived a liking for him, and had come to count on his visits of an evening, loving an argument; her mother always blessed him when he came and went, and baked choice sweetmeats for his delectation.

It was not long before Iskender received evidence that the question of his change of faith possessed a lively interest for others besides the priest Mîtri and his lovely daughter. One day, returning from a walk with the Emîr, he heard that the missionary had been inquiring for him in his absence; and the following evening, on the road to Mîtri's house, he was overtaken by the Father of Ice in person, who got down off his horse and addressed him very kindly.

Why did Iskender never come to church nowadays? why had he not been to visit the ladies? why had he refused their offer of employment in the house, which would probably have led to better things, perhaps to his appointment as assistant master in one of the Mission schools? Even now it was not too late to reconsider; they, on their side, were quite willing to forget bygones. It had grieved them much to hear that Iskender was drifting into bad company, and entering on a vicious course of life; still more to learn that he showed an inclination to forget the enlightened religious teaching which he had received in childhood.

His words moved Iskender more than he desired to show, arousing in his mind a thousand happy memories, reproachful now. He replied in Arabic with the sullenness that masks emotion:

"I am a son of the Arabs, and I return to my own kind. Allah knows I am nothing to be considered."

"What do you mean?" asked the missionary in a colder tone.

"Your Honour and the ladies could not make of me an Englishman. It is for that you cast me off."

"We tried to make of you a Christian man." The missionary's face grew stern, and his ice-green eyes gave forth a sword-flash. "Well, go your way; God grant it lead not to perdition!" He nodded his head in the direction of the two palm-trees which marked in the dusk the whereabouts of Mîtri's house.

Iskender, glancing in the same direction, discerned the tall black figure of the father of Nesîbeh in the road, looking out for him. The idea of evil in connection with the jolly priest suddenly struck him as perverse and ludicrous. He laughed in the face of the missionary.

"My friends are no worse than your friends. And which of us will be lost, which saved, will not be known until the last judgment. May Our Lord forgive your Honour for such bad thoughts."

In a white rage, the Father of Ice remounted his horse and rode away, disregarding the ironical salute of Mîtri, who stood out before his door, awaiting the arrival of his catechumen.

"What didst thou say to the hog to make him snort like that?" was the priest's first question of Iskender; and, when the youth informed him, "By Allah, it was a true word," he chuckled heartily. "They think all men should be on one pattern—the pattern of their wondrous selves, whom they esteem perfection. They suppose that what is good for their race must be good for all the others, thus ignoring the providence of Allah, Who made the peoples of the earth to differ in appearance, speech, and manners. They know nothing of our beliefs and ways of thought, so call them wicked, since they are not theirs. They condemn men freely, sitting in the seat of

judgment, unaware that they themselves will be judged at the last day. By Allah, there is only one of all that breed whom one can talk to as a human being—I mean the little preacher Ward, who runs their errands. He has not been here for three months or more. From much travelling among the villages, he knows the customs of our people and respects them. Moreover, he is modest, while the rest are arrogant.... But, merciful Allah, what is this I see? What ails thee, madwoman?"

The mother of Iskender, stealing forth from the priest's house, had cast herself upon her son, with fearful moans:

"O Holy Virgin! O my terror! Please God, he did not see me where I stood in the doorway! Some one has informed him where I go—it must be Costantin, the spy and liar—and now he rides at dusk to try and catch me. I shall not come here again; it is too dangerous. Come thou to the house sometimes quite late at night. Farewell, O beloved, and may Allah keep thee!"

"Allah is greatest!" ejaculated Mîtri, with a shrug and a gruff laugh, as he watched her flight along the twilight road. "Now let us enter and dispute together."

But the shock of his encounter with the missionary had left Iskender with no wits for argument. He took leave earlier than usual; and, as he walked back to the hotel in the dark, he realised that the last vestige of his Protestantism had that evening been demolished. His baptism would follow as a matter of course, in the mind of Mîtri; and he was by no means prepared to receive it, since the priest, for the triumph of his congregation, was certain to demand a public ceremony, and Iskender feared the scorn of his Emîr, whom he imagined to be something of a sceptic.

Moreover, it would entail a full confession of his inmost thoughts, which, with Wady 'l Mulûk in mind, he could not face; and at least it ought to be postponed till after the great Fast, which the Orthodox observe with cruel rigour.

To stave off the ordeal he saw himself forced to invent a new set of doubts and objections. On his next visit to the house of Mîtri, he owned himself convinced of the vanity of the Protestant faith, but hinted at an inclination towards the Catholic. The big priest stared at him with mouth agape.

"Curse thy father!" he exclaimed. "Wouldst thou turn from bad to worse, and rush straight to Jehenum. Thou hast studied history, so knowest that the Latins are our ancient enemies. They slew us with the Muslims when their armies took by storm the Holy Places, and enslaved the remnant of us in a cruel slavery. They have statues, rank idols, in their churches; and is it not the worst idolatry to concentrate the power which belongs of right to the whole Body of Christ, and adore it in the person of one living man? Their lips have corrupted the creed: they have no baptism, so can have no orders. Their Pope of Rome himself is nothing but an unbaptized layman. Speak of that again, and I will drive thee from my house with beatings!"

Iskender, greatly alarmed, made haste to explain that he had spoken in jest. He had caught an angry look from the girl Nesîbeh.

"Jest not upon what concerns thy soul's salvation," said the priest, letting his wrath evaporate. "Thou knowest not what harm those Latins do us, tempting souls astray. They allow proselytes to retain our beliefs, our language, and our form of service, so only that they acknowledge the supremacy of the hound of Rome, which means perdition, truly, in the next world, but foreign protection in this. It is little wonder that they have seduced many.... What hinders thee from receiving at my hands the inestimable boon of baptism?"

Iskender murmured that he still had doubts. The angry glances of the girl Nesîbeh made him shame-faced.

"Show me thy doubts that I may straight resolve them."

Iskender was muttering that he must think them out, that they were not yet quite clear in his mind, when Nesîbeh cried from the inner room:

"Hear him not, O my father! The low dog is mocking thee. Force him to be baptized, or drive him forth!"

"Silence, shameless one!" the priest cried sternly; nevertheless he took her suggestion and, turning to Iskender, whose brow was throbbing painfully, inquired: "Hast thou one good reason to desire delay?"

"Yes, O our father!" Iskender blurted out the truth at last. "I know not how my patron would regard it. On him I depend entirely for the present. I have heard him scoff at all who change the faith that they were born in. Wait a little, I beseech thee, until he is gone!"

"Is that in truth all?" replied Mîtri, fully satisfied. "The right is with thee. We must wait awhile. But Allah grant thou die not in the interval."

CHAPTER XVI

The season recommended by Elias as most favourable for their adventure now drew near. Each steamer that touched at the port disgorged a little crowd of travellers. The Emîr being no longer alone in the hotel, his radiance suffered eclipse. Other Franks of distinction came and went continually; dragomans, splendidly attired, hung about the entrance, tugging at their moustachios, tapping their riding-boots with silver-mounted whips, and spitting superbly, as became men whose special province it was to order the lords of gold about like dogs. Merchants and pedlars, as many as could get permission from the sons of Mûsa, spread out their wares on the floor of the hall, and smiled allurement on the visitors. The servants of Cook and other Powers of Europe and America strutted about and gave command like princes.

Iskender, for his footing in the house, helped the servants wherever an extra hand was required, and in that way learnt to wait at table, to polish boots and brush clothes, and acquired some inkling of the art of cooking. The positive need of these attainments for the coming journey made him quick to learn. The Emîr himself admired his general usefulness, and the sons of Mûsa paid him money for his services. As a result of all this bustle there were fewer visits to the house of Mîtri, while the book and paint-box were perforce laid by.

The excitement of Elias grew with every day. He never tired of asking whether all was ready, of reminding Iskender of the need of this or that small comfort, and urging him to fix a date for their departure. Indeed his eagerness became a visible disorder, and, seeing him mingle freely with the other dragomans, Iskender went in hourly fear of indiscretions. One noon when, after a spell of work in the hot kitchen, he had rushed to the outer door to breath the air, he fell upon a group of persons splendidly arrayed, who welcomed his appearance with unfriendly glee. Yuhanna Mahbûb, the bully, seized his arm, and threatened him with his whip not altogether playfully.

"Confess the truth!" he commanded, with his cruel grin. "Thy journey with the Emîr is not for pastime. Thou hast a secret; it is useless to deny it, for we know the fact from thy partner Elias. I, with others of thy friends, resent this great preferment of Elias. Reveal thy secret now immediately, and if it is of worth, I too will go with thee."

"What words are these?" Iskender cried out in extreme amazement. "A secret! I possess a secret! It is some lying fable of that mad Elias!"

"That, Allah knows, is possible," put in a bystander. "Elias is the very prince of fable-mongers."

Yuhanna still kept grinning in Iskender's face.

"Wilt thou swear by the Blessed Sacrament that thou knowest nothing of the whereabouts of any treasure?"

"Art mad? How should I know of any treasure?"

"Swear by the Blessed Sacrament! Nought else will serve; and if hereafter it should prove that thou art perjured, I will beat thy filthy soul from out thy body."

"By the Blessed Sacrament I swear!" replied Iskender.

"That is well!" Yuhanna curled his long moustachios. "Then why does Elias refuse every other engagement? It is not likely thy Emîr will pay him much."

"By the same pledge I know not! Ask the man himself!"

"Thou seest, 'Hanna, as I told thee, it is all a lie," laughed a bystander, the same who had before spoken.

Iskender escaped from them, bearing the conscience of a perjured wretch. He called Allah Most High to witness how the sin was forced on him. It was some comfort to reflect that he was still technically a Protestant, so might be taken to have sworn by the sacrament of that sect which he knew to be without Divine significance. But all the same his crime was very heinous.

Early in the morning following this grave event, Iskender was engaged in sweeping out the entrance-hall, when his uncle strode in out of the sunlight, of which he seemed an offshoot in his splendour of apparel. More respectable than ever through pride in the command of a company of high-born English bent on sight-seeing, he addressed his nephew from the height of condescension:

"O son of my brother, I start this day upon a journey of ten days with my party, and would say a word to thee before I go. Elias tells me that both thou and he propose to ride forth with the young khawâjah, and show him something of the land. That is well. Elias, though sometimes foolish, has experience; and I have told him to instruct thee fully in our business. Go not too far, for travel in wild places is too arduous for one so young; and Elias has little acquaintance with the desert ways, and that little disastrous, he and all his party having been captured and held to ransom by the Bedû, because he forgot to pay the tribes their proper dues. Be cautious and observant. In sh' Allah we shall all return in safety."

"In sh' Allah!" echoed Iskender in great astonishment; for it had that minute occurred to him that he had no real knowledge of the whereabouts of the place to which he had undertaken to conduct his patron, beyond what Elias had implied, that it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wady Mûsa. His first sentiment on the discovery was one of thankfulness, because he had not sworn falsely in his oath to Yuhanna.

His next was one of self-abasement before Allah. Was not His mercy boundless, like His power? During the few days which remained before the start, he spent much time in prayer, and offered votive candles to be burnt in Mîri's little church beneath the ilex-tree. Why should he not find his way to the Valley of Gold, by the blessing of the All Powerful? Did not his vision of the place, and the strange concatenation of chances which had led him on to the adventure, seem to indicate that he was destined to find it? Even if he failed, the Emîr, he told himself, would have had a pleasant outing, and could not in the nature of things be very angry. Thus he lulled his fears.

The one thing left to trouble him was the adherence of Elias, and he tried by every means to throw him off.

"We cannot afford a horse for thee," he told the dragoman. "Allah knows I have enough to do to make the money suffice for the bare necessities."

"What did I tell thee?" said Elias cheerfully. "When thou hast hired a cook and baggage animals, I know, by Allah, there is nothing left. No matter, I will hire a horse on my own account."

Iskender next informed his friend in confidence that there was no real intention of going to the Valley of the Kings. It was all a joke between himself and the Emîr.

"Ha, wouldest thou leave me out?" exclaimed Elias, with a laugh. "No, no, my soul. I am not to be gulled so easily!"

Iskender despaired of ever getting rid of him, when Elias himself unexpectedly afforded him the opportunity. Two days before the start, the Emîr asked for an account of the arrangements, and Iskender gave it, in the presence of Elias. His Honour was to ride the horse which he had lately bought; Elias would provide his own. Iskender himself would act as cook and waiter and his Honour's body-servant, and also assist in his functions the single muleteer, who provided three mules and one horse. A good-sized tent, a little the worse for wear, a collapsible bed, a table, a chair, and cooking utensils completed an outfit of which the whole cost amounted to little more than half the sum which the Frank had assigned as a limit.

The Emîr was greatly pleased; not so Elias. When Iskender had made an end, the dragoman flung up his hands.

"That only!" he cried to heaven; "and for an Emîr, a great one, like our friend here!"

It was a crime unheard of, an abomination! Their beloved would die of discomfort in a single night. No, that should never be, so long as he (Elias) enjoyed life and health, with some slight credit among honest people. He would himself provide two upright men, a cook and a waiter, at his own expense. He knew them well. They had retired from business, but they loved him dearly and would come forward willingly, he felt sure, to save so excellent a prince from vile indignity.

This outpour of his indignation was addressed to Iskender in fierce Arabic. When his proposal was translated, the Emîr pooh-poohed it, declaring Iskender's arrangement to be all he could desire. Elias then, in a frenzy, fell down at his feet, imploring him with tears to reconsider.

"Beeble'll think we're some common fellows and be rude to us," he moaned. "Neffer mind the exbense, sir; that not matter a blow. These beeble friends o' mine, they come for nothin' 't all. You gif them what you dam' blease!"

His agony was terrible to witness. Iskender had the feelings of a murderer as he looked on. Their patron stroked his small moustache and smiled uneasily.

"You not go like that, sir!" pursued Elias, starting up. "It is a shame for you! I go to the consul now direc'ly; make him a-stob you! Now I'm off! My friends of which I speak lif long way off; but I be back with them in two days, the time you start. Promise to wait till then! All right! Ta-ta!" With a final casting-up of hands to heaven, the enthusiast was gone.

"We had better start at once, or he'll spoil everything," said the Englishman, when he recovered from his astonishment. It was precisely what his henchman had been thinking. By no word had they pledged themselves to abide his return.

Iskender went at once to hasten the preparations. But their muleteer proved sulky on the sudden change of plans; and it was only as the result of a dispute which lasted the whole afternoon that Iskender wrung from him an assurance that all would be ready when the sun next rose.

CHAPTER XVII

Iskender, having roused his dear Emîr, went out to inspect the train. It was then some half-hour later than the time appointed; yet neither mules nor man were in sight, only the horse of the Emîr, with its neat leather saddle and bridle, was being led up and down before the hotel by a bare-legged boy. In a rage Iskender hastened to the khan whence at the recommendation of Elias he had hired his

muleteer. There his reproaches caused extreme amazement. The man, he was told, had received his order as for the following day. He was not on the premises, and his house was some way off.

An idle witness of the youth's despair volunteered to go and fetch the defaulter; he set off at a run, but was gone for more than an hour. Iskender tired of waiting, and strode back angrily to the hotel. Tidings of his dilemma having gone abroad, he was escorted by a little crowd of the curious, among them some muleteers who were loud in their offers of service. From a distance he beheld the missionary, with back towards him, conversing with his patron at the door, and quickened step; but before he could come up the dialogue, whatever it concerned, was ended, and his enemy had moved on.

"Not about you this time," his beloved laughed; "though he declares that you are none of you to be trusted out of sight. He has just been warning me against our friend Elias, who, he says, once played a trick upon some tourists—bribed the Bedouins to take them prisoner, and let him rescue them. I assured him that Elias was not going with us; but he seemed to doubt my word, and I shall begin to doubt it myself unless those mules turn up. What has become of them?"

"The man pretends I told him for to-morrow. That is a lie, because I spoke as plain as anythin'. I think it some trick of that Elias to detain us here."

By that time all the unemployed muleteers in the town had joined the growing crowd that watched their conference. One man had gone so far as to bring a good-looking mule ready saddled with him, as a sample of what he could provide. Iskender paid no heed to the prayers of all these suppliants, whispered confidentially by those in front, shouted with fierce gesticulations from those behind, any more than he gave ear to the counsel of the sons of Mûsa that he should employ one of them. He still had hopes of the person he had first engaged, who appeared at length, but without any mules, and in a state of indignation even greater than Iskender's.

The clash of words when they met electrified the whole street; the mouths of the rival muleteers, now mere onlookers, grinned all together, showing milk-white teeth. Accused of laziness, of breach of contract, the delinquent hurled back the accusations in Iskender's face. He said he knew his business, and was not going to start without proper orders. The Khawâjah Elias, the responsible dragoman, was away, and might Allah end his life immediately if he set forth without him at the call of a beardless boy.

So the truth was out. Iskender reported to his patron that the man was a mere creature of Elias.

"There's nothing for it," said the Emîr with a shrug. "We must engage another man."

"But I baid this one already some money."

"Never mind. It will cost us more than that if we wait for Elias!"

So that muleteer was dismissed and retired, conscientiously objecting in terms abusive and obscene; while the man who had had the wit to bring a mule already saddled was promptly engaged in his place. This individual had attracted the Frank from the first by his cheerful looks, and the way he kept aloof from the group that pestered, only smiling now and then to the Englishman and patting his mule significantly. He now showed great alacrity, kissing first the Emîr's hand, then Iskender's, asking where the tent and other baggage might be found, and promising by the cloak of the Prophet, to have all in perfect readiness within an hour. The other candidates then fell away, one or two volunteering to help the winner with his preparations, the majority sitting down on their heels in the shadows of neighbouring walls to watch the outcome of it all, the actual start.

The new muleteer was punctual to his word. But by the time the laden mules came up, luncheon was ready, and the sons of Mûsa insisted on the Frank's partaking of the meal. An invitation, the first he had ever received, to join them at their private table, reconciled Iskender to this new delay. He told the muleteer to go on in advance, indicating the road he was to take and naming a good place for that night's encampment; and saw the mules start off with jangling bells, leaving behind the horse he was to ride, which was tethered in the yard of the hotel.

After the meal the Frank was lazy with repletion, and asked to rest awhile; so that the afternoon was far advanced before they got on horseback. The Frank was then for a gallop; but Iskender warned him that that pace was not for travel, and kept him down to the walk. Passing the house of Mîtri, he looked for the girl Nesîbeh, hoping she would see him riding at his lord's right hand, but in vain.

After an hour's journey, having left the orange-gardens far behind, they forsook the highway and followed a bridle-path through fields. Big scarlet tulips shone among the green cornstems. Here and there upon the fertile plain stood forth a grove of olives, their foliage looking nearly white by contrast with its own dark shadow; a village of mud-houses set upon a knoll and plumed with palms, with attendant barns and ovens shaped like beehives; a man with oxen ploughing or a camel browsing in the custody of a small child. The breeze grew fresher as the sun declined. The colours of a dove's breast played upon the barren heights which walled the land to eastward. The sun sank lower and lower; shadows grew upon the plain; the sea-coast sandhills became clearly outlined; soon rays went up like fire from off the sea, and the whole rampart of the eastern heights became empurpled; then a shadow rose, a cold breeze roughed the corn, and presently the evening star shone out in a soft sky.

It was dark when they reached the appointed halting-place, in a wady of the foothills, close to a village which possessed a spring of water. They found their tent well-pitched, a good fire burning in the shelter of a cunning wind-screen, and the kettle boiling. They had tea at once, and afterwards Iskender went to cook the supper. His lord soon followed with desire to help.

"It's splendid fun!" he cried. "You are a trump, Iskender!"

Iskender answered nothing, but gave praise to Allah.

CHAPTER XVIII

About the third hour of a cloudless day Elias Abdul Messîh crossed the sandhills from the northward, traversed the gardens, and approached the town. He was riding a showy horse, which he caused to prance whenever any one was looking; and had assumed the panoply of the fashionable dragoman. His slim but manly figure well became a tight and many-buttoned vest of murrey velvet, a zouave jacket of blue silky cloth, and baggy trousers of the same material, whose superfluous lengths were tucked away in riding-boots of undressed leather. A scarlet dust-cloak streamed from off his shoulders. The tassel of his fez, worn far back on the head and dinted knowingly fluttered on the breeze; the tassels on his bridle led a dance.

In his wake followed two fat, middle-aged men, set one behind the other on a donkey's back, of whom the hindmost held a rope which led four mules laden with all the requisites of Frankish travel.

Elias flourished in his hand the silver-mounted whip of rhinoceros-hide which he had long ago reclaimed from the Emîr. The pride of a leader of men informed his bearing as he brought his train at last through the crowded market, shouting loftily to clear a way.

Arrived at the khan where he was accustomed to hire beasts of burden, he was preparing to dismount, when a man ran out and, stooping, kissed his stirrup. It was the muleteer who had been first retained by Iskender.

"May Allah keep thee, O my dear!" exclaimed Elias, cheered by such worship in a public place. "What news in the town to-day?"

The muleteer raised hands and eyes to heaven.

"Grave news, O my lord Elias. They sent me about my business, and are gone without thee."

"Merciful Allah!" cried Elias, stupefied. "Gone, sayest thou? They are gone, the miscreants?... But it is impossible. Gone, sayest thou? When and how did they go?"

In vain did he strive to discredit the muleteer's story, throwing doubt on every point as it arose; it was only to remove all ground for doubt concerning it.

"Merciful Allah!" he exclaimed again, in tones of horror. "May their fathers be destroyed, their mothers ravished. Wait till I catch thee, O thou pig Iskender! The good Emîr will perish of discomfort; for that treacherous boy is ignorant of all things that pertain to travel. Y' Allah! Let us make all speed to overtake those wretched ones!"

But his companions, Aflatûn the cook and Fâris the waiter, were in no such hurry. They were hungry from much riding on an empty stomach, and flatly refused to proceed another step until replenished. Cursing their greed, Elias was forced to resign himself. He indulged in eating, as he told himself, to pass the time; but afterwards, when it came to coffee and narghilehs, he squandered more than an hour in boasting with what speed he would catch up the fugitives, how suddenly and effectually he would repay the beast Iskender. It was Aflatûn the cook who reminded him at length that time wore on. Once on horseback, his eagerness again became active, and, in a measure, practical. He knew the direction Iskender had proposed to take, and, stopping before the hotel for a minute, he learnt from the sons of Mûsa the name of the first halting-place.

Amused by his indignation at the start without him, those old friends mocked him, crying:

"They have fled from thee. Sooner than endure thy converse any longer, they have thrown themselves on the mercy of Allah. They would rather face wild beasts and savage warriors than have thy sweet voice always at their ears."

Cursing the ancestry of such heartless jokers, Elias rowelled his horse's flanks with the sharp corners of his stirrups, and went off at a furious gallop. Through the orange-gardens, out on to the plain, he sped like the wind, until his steed gave signs of fainting and he had to stop. Looking back along the way he had come, he could not see his companions and their string of mules, though the ground was open and the air quite clear. Evidently they had not yet left the gardens. With horrid malediction of their religion and parentage he rode on at a foot's pace.

At the third hour after noon he reached the spot where Iskender and the Frank had passed the night, and stood staring at the ashes of their fire with teeth and hands tightly clenched. A fellâh from the neighbouring village told him they had set out very early that morning with the avowed intention of making a long day's march.

These tidings sent Elias raging mad. They were fleeing towards the valley full of gold, of which Iskender, alone of all men, knew

the whereabouts; and he, Elias, their predestined chief, was left behind! His fiery spirit craved to mount at once and gallop day and night till he rejoined those treasure-seekers; but the frailty of his horse precluded any such transports, and the snail-like pace of his adherents bound him down. At present he was obliged to wait for Aflatûn and Fâris and the baggage animals, while conscious of the fugitives receding rapidly, sucked in irresistibly to a whirlpool of living light, his mind's image of the object of desire.

Having procured some barley and chopped straw for his horse, he left the beast in charge of some of the villagers, and climbed alone to the summit of a rock hard by, which commanded the plain. His retinue appeared, a great way off, mere dots upon a certain cornfield. The sun was high when he first descried them; it had touched the sea before they came in hail.

"Make haste, accursed sluggards! Yallah! Onward! They fly before us! We must march all night," he cried in anguish.

But they said:

"Wait a little! All the beasts are tired. We will not march through the night. In truth we are minded to have done with this mad business, which is the same as hunting the shadow of a flying bird. Allah alone knows whether we shall catch those people; but we ourselves are able to perceive that we are tired and hungry."

"May Allah shorten your days!" roared Elias furiously. "Would you fail me now and betray me, O treacherous dogs?"

They still refused to travel through the night; and when he persisted in requiring it of them, took umbrage, and vowed that they would leave him then and there. For hours he remonstrated with them, but they only ate and drank and smoked, then slept, unheeding. He lay down by their side, but could not sleep.

At the first breath of dawn they were still snoring, when Elias rose, prepared his horse, and rode away. After all he felt well rid of such unsoulful hogs. He could travel much more quickly by himself; and the fewer reached the Valley of the Kings the better, for some are thieves, and gold corrupts true men. So he rode on, pushing his mount to the utmost, in and out among the stony hills, inquiring at every village and of all he met in the way for tidings of the Frank and his companion. In the heat of the day he paused for an hour, to bait and water his horse, which, nevertheless, was quite worn out ere sunset. Elias was forced to dismount and lead him slowly.

The mountain slopes were hung with vineyards, fields and gardens. Sauntering groups appeared upon the path, which now began to assume the aspect of a proper road. Rounding a shoulder of the terraced hill, Elias had a view of the chief town of the region, clothing half the mountainside, beneath its famous mosque. He determined to enter the place and make inquiries, though the Muslim mob, he knew, was fierce and dangerous.

Going straight to the house of a Christian of his own Church, he asked for hospitality, which was granted to him in Allah's name. Having cared for the horse, he went indoors and told his errand, seeking tidings of the chase; and presently his host went out to make inquiries. He returned to declare, upon authority of an officer of the watch, that no party resembling that described had entered the town.

Now Iskender had named this city many times as lying in the direct road to the seat of treasure. His avoidance of it, therefore, must have been of purpose to elude Elias—his best, his truest friend! The outraged dragoman called God to witness. It was evident that Iskender meant to be the only one to find the golden valley. Having used his money as the means to get there, he would doubtless make away with the Emîr. Elias wept at picture of the cruel fate which awaited that unsuspecting nobleman. However, he himself was not yet beaten. He still had hopes that, by minute inquiry, he might come upon their tracks and overtake them.

But when the morrow came his horse was useless. Having money, he went out to hire another. But while he was about the business, soldiers came to him and asked to be shown the permission by which he travelled. He produced a document, but it was out of date. They told him so. In some alarm, he swore by Allah he was in the service of an English prince as mighty as the Sultan. They straightway asked to see the prince in question; and Elias had to own that he was not forthcoming. Then they laughed him to scorn—the dragoman without a tourist. One took a fancy to the knife that decked his waist-band. Another admired his whip, and promptly took it. His pistol too was gone. In vain he looked for help or sympathy; the crowd of fierce-eyed, turbaned Muslims only jeered at his despair. At a threat to put him in prison, he flung them all the money he possessed, then cast himself upon the ground with face buried in his arms. Seeing he was finished, his tormentors left him thus; and the crowd, when they were gone, advised him friendly, bidding him look to Allah for redress.

Scared in his very soul, Elias rose at last and crept back to the house of his co-religionist. There he sat and moaned through all that day, refusing food and every other comfort. Disarmed and penniless, he could proceed no further in that lawless region. It was all Iskender's fault—the cunning devil! The valley of the gold seemed now his legal birthright, of which he had been defrauded by a wicked malefactor, who, not content with that, was leading out the good Emîr to kill him in the desert. Iskender had bribed Aflatûn and Fâris; Iskender had lamed his horse; Iskender had set on the soldiers to despoil him. By the time he started on his homeward way, the world was poisoned by Iskender's wickedness; he could not look at rock, or myrtle-bush, or wayside flower without groans and gnashing of teeth; and wherever he reposed at noon, or spent the night, he told his wrongs. The story ran before him through the countryside. When he came at last to his own door, it was to find a crowd awaiting him, anxious to know the truth of strange reports. Several of the dragomans were there, including Abdullah, uncle of Iskender, who questioned Elias in no peaceful tone.

Awed by the sternness of so respectable a man, Elias dissembled his rage, and spoke in sorrow:

"Alas! it is too true. Allah knows, it grieves my soul to relate it. Iskender, whom I loved as my own eyes, has led the good Emîr into the wilderness, meaning to rob him there and take his life."

"It is a lie!" cried Abdullah furiously. "Take back those words this instant, or thy blood shall pay for it. Allah knows thou wast ever the chief of liars."

"That is true," agreed the bystanders.

"That is true, perhaps," Elias owned; "yet in this case I speak the truth. Those two had learnt the hiding-place of a great treasure, and Iskender means to have the whole of it. I had secret warning of his wicked purpose, and went to bring good honest men to defeat it. But he, suspecting what I was about, persuaded the Emîr to start without me. Moreover, he dismissed the muleteer whom I had chosen, engaging in his stead a murderous ruffian. My soul died within me when I heard of their departure. Allah witness how I strove to overtake them. But the rogue had set every one upon the road against me. I was delayed at every turn, flouted and finally robbed of my weapons and all my money." He exhibited his empty belt. "So I returned, despairing. May God have mercy on that kind Emîr, and let his soul find peace."

These words, and still more the heart-broken manner of their utterance, made a profound impression upon all who heard them. They were received as true by every one there except Abdullah, who talked of hiring ruffians to assassinate the wicked slanderer. He swore at once to clear his nephew's honour. But his excitement was regarded with mere pity, as natural to a man afflicted in so near a relative.

CHAPTER XIX

Abdullah's furious indignation with Elias was complicated by a strain of keen anxiety upon his own account. Though most of the story seemed absurd to his intelligence, there remained enough of possible and even probable to justify dismay in so respectable a man. It seemed more than likely that his nephew, that unlucky boy, had led a British subject into lawless regions quite unknown to him; if harm ensued there would be trouble with the consul; and the power called Cook was so careful for its dragomans that the mere relationship to one whose face was blackened might involve dismissal. The bare idea of this contingency swamped Abdullah's intellect in pure amazement, for since his vision of the Blessed Virgin years ago he had believed that the breath of scandal could not come near him. He crossed himself repeatedly and muttered prayers. But these misgivings were secreted from the world, before which he appeared as the intrepid champion of his absent nephew, prepared to refute the story in its entirety.

His first thought was to make Elias eat his words either by bribes or violence; but a little reflection sufficed to show it worthless. For, once pronounced, those words were all men's utterance; the town, the countryside, was now ablaze, and Elias but a fuse that had done its work. Abdullah demanded on behalf of Iskender that all who professed any knowledge of the matter should be called and questioned in the hearing of the group of dragomans. The proprietor and servants of the khan, who had beheld Iskender's mad excitement on the morning of the start, the discarded muleteer, Aflatûn and Fâris, who still lingered in the town in hopes to recover their expenses from Elias, with others quite unknown, bore witness to the suspicious manner of the young man's flight, and the dance

he had led each and all of them. Abdullah gnawed his heavy grey moustache, with eyes downcast, when Elias turned towards him with expressive hands.

From the scene of this inquiry, which was the tavern in the ruined cloister, looking through shadowed arches on the purple sea, a professional errand led Abdullah to the hotel of Mûsa el Barûdi. The sons of Mûsa sat on stools before the door, as did also the priest Mîtri, taking coffee with them. "What news?" they asked. Abdullah hid his face. Could it be that they had not yet heard those wicked lies about Iskender? He enlightened them forthwith with fervent crossings of himself and prayers to Allah; and confessed that he was at his wits' end, since all the evidence obtainable tended strongly to confirm the insane story. The laughter of his hearers did him good. They ridiculed the very notion of Iskender's guile; and they were men of position, respectable men, whose opinion was worth having, while the rest were riff-raff. Abdullah went home greatly comforted.

But the story spread and grew in all the land, with variations and most wonderful additions. People came to Abdullah for the rights of it, and were visibly disappointed and incredulous at receiving a flat denial. They wanted the true story to replace the false, and Abdullah knew no more than that Elias was a liar. He sat still in his house for hours together, gnawing his thick moustache and staring at the ground. Then he bethought him to call on the mother of Iskender, who might have knowledge of her son's true purpose in this mad excursion. If he had abstained from visiting her till now, it was in the hope to keep from her a scandal which was sure to wound her. Now the time had come to try her value as a witness. Though the weather was bad, he could not wait for sunshine, but, taking his umbrella, walked out on to the sandhills through the pelting rain. His boots were caked with mud when he reached the little house; he would not enter therefore, but spoke from the doorway, sheltered by his umbrella. It seemed she had nothing to tell him. It was only from the voice of common rumour that she knew that her precious son had left the town, and since then reports had reached her which made her wash her hands of him for ever. When those reports came to the ears of the missionaries, as they were sure to do, it would ruin his mother in their eyes for ever.

"Take no thought for him, O Abdullah!" she cried furiously. "He is no son of mine, but a changeling of the children of the Jânn. Doubtless my true son, whom I loved and nursed, is with the devils somewhere in the Jebel Kâf. Allah knows he was too good for me; my pride in him was too great! And so they took him, and put a miscreant, a devil, in his place. They say he has a mighty treasure written in his name, so that none but he can free it from the spell that guards it; that shows us what he really is, for who but a jinni, a vile changeling, would hide so glad a secret from his loving mother? Thou sayest, Has he killed the good Emîr? He may have done so, for I say he is no child of mine; he is a devil. Tell all the world my son is lost to me, carried off to the Jebel Kâf or some lone ruin; and a jinni masquerades in his likeness, doing evil."

She screamed her parrot-scream; she could not talk. It was one of her black days when the world was turned to madness. Abdullah retired from the vain attempt to get some sense from her with hopelessness increased instead of lessened.

That same evening, as he sat in his house, enjoying a ray of pallid sunshine sent through the branches of a leafless fig-tree which stretched its gnarled, grey twisted arms before his door, Yuhanna Mahbûb came to him with an angry brow.

"What is this I hear about Iskender?" he inquired. "Within this hour I have returned with my party from El Cuds. He has gone with the Emîr to find a treasure; is it true? I came at once to thee, his near relation. For know that he swore to me by the Blessed Sacrament, in the presence of witnesses, that he knew nothing of any treasure, nor was his trip with the Emîr concerned with aught save pleasure. This I tell thee that thou blame me not hereafter if I take dire vengeance on the perjured dog."

"Wait a little, O 'Hanna," said Abdullah pacifically, "thou wilt learn, in sh' Allah, that he did not swear falsely. All this scandal is the produce of Elias, whom all men know for the very father of lies. Wait, I tell thee, and the poor lad's innocence will be seen."

"Aye, wait I must perforce, for he is absent. Were he here among us, I should not have had recourse to thee unless as bearer of his dead body. He swore, I tell thee, by the Blessed Sacrament! Shall such a wretch live on, to practise sacrilege?"

"May Allah, of his mercy, show the truth to us," replied Abdullah, while Yuhanna went off, breathing threats against the perjurer. He prayed to God that his nephew might not have sworn falsely and so incurred the punishment of everlasting fire. Yet there was much treasure lying undiscovered in the land, and it might be that his nephew had got wind of some of it. He knew not what to think, but spent most of the night in prayer, prostrate before that tiny picture of the Mother of God which he had set up to commemorate his radiant vision.

In the morning came the finishing blow. He stood in the doorway, watching his chickens pecking amid the wet litter of refuse round the trunk of the fig-tree, when the sound of a horse's hoof-beats reached his ears, and presently from a narrow opening in the neighbouring wall emerged a Frank in black clothes, black, leaf-shaped hat and yellow riding-boots—the Father of Ice in person. The missionary dismounted, tied his horse by the head-rope to a loose stone of the wall, and came forward, stooping to escape the branches of the fig-tree.

"Welcome, sir!" exclaimed Abdullah, smiling and bowing, though his mind misgave him. "My house a boor one, sir, but at your service."

"Good day to you," replied the missionary coldly, and passed in before him.

"I have come about this shocking business of your nephew," he observed, declining to sit down, though Abdullah brought forth

cushions. "The news reached me only yesterday, and I have been this morning to see that man Elias. His story seems quite clear, in spite of all the nonsense about buried treasure. The young Englishman doubtless took a considerable sum of money with him, and Iskender has beguiled him by the story of the treasure, meaning to rob him, if not worse."

"Oh, sir, it's all a lie, by God!" exclaimed Abdullah; but the Father of Ice paid no attention to him.

"I grieve to think of that misguided boy. He was like a child of our own at the Mission, till bad companions led him into evil ways. Of course, now he must pay the penalty of his transgression. You natives must be taught once more that the life and property of British subjects are not to be lightly made away with. I wrote to the consul last night, directly I had news of this atrocious affair. Iskender, poor misguided boy, will bear the punishment. But in my opinion, and in the sight of God, there are others more to blame than he in the matter. I mean those who led him astray, who first suggested to him a life of fraud and peculation." The missionary looked straight into Abdullah's eyes with the sternness of a righteous judge. "It is of no use to deny your own part in it, for I have spoken with the mother of the wretched lad, and she has told me how you were the first to propose that he should attach himself to this young English visitor with a view to making money, how you egged him on and taught him all the tricks of the trade. Are you not ashamed of yourself, an old man, with death close before you? But all you natives are alike conscienceless, blind to the truth as if a curse from God was on you. Be sure that I, for one, am not blind to your guilt in this affair, and that I shall mention it to Cook's agent at the first opportunity. You have led the boy to renounce his faith, and now to crime! I hope you are proud of your handiwork! Good-day!"

Abdullah found not a word. He stood staring at his feet, stunned and trembling. The whole structure of his pride caved in on him. He, the Sheykh of the Dragomans, the respectable of respectables, made so by especial favour of the Blessed Virgin, to hear such words from one of those very English whose esteem upheld him! He soiled his face with mud and camel's dung and sat in his house, lamenting, refusing every comfort that his wife or the sympathising neighbours could devise to offer. Some two hours after noon there came a storm with terrifying flashes. The thunder shook the house, the solid earth. At one moment the gnarled and twisted branches of the fig-tree were seen black against a sharp illumination, the next smoke-grey and weird amid the inky gloom. They seemed like snakes approaching stealthily, and then like loathsome arms intent to seize his soul. The storm gave place to steady rain; the world was lightened somewhat, but without relief. Abdullah, though a prey to all the horrors, sat there quite still till evening, when suddenly the force of life returned to him. He rushed out to the nearest tavern, called for arac, and drank heavily. The honour which had resulted from his vision now seemed torn from him; and since She withdrew her favour, he was free to break his vow. That night, returning home, he snatched the sacred picture from its shelf and trod it under foot, to his wife's terror.

CHAPTER XX

Southward and eastward rode Iskender with his loved Emîr. Crags succeeded crags; the sky was turquoise. At noon the very gorges held no shade; but in the morning and the evening there were halls of coolness, while the sunlight made the heights as bright as flower-beds. Wild-flowers shone everywhere among the rocks; and in the open places blew wide fields of them. Whenever they came to a village, and pitched their tent beside the well, the inhabitants hustled out to do them service in return for stale scraps of news from the outer world; and Iskender told them of the greatness and the power of his Emîr, till they esteemed it a rich reward merely to peep through the hangings of the tent at such a potentate. Even supposing that they never found the Valley of the Kings, this ramble together through delightful solitudes was worth the money spent, it seemed to him. The valley full of gold was a pretext only, giving the taste of purpose to their doings and clothing them in the glamour of romance. And his patron seemed to view it in the same reasonable light, for he evinced no hurry, but when they reached some pleasant spot, would waste a day there, prowling among the gullies with his gun, while Iskender sketched. If the worst came to the worst, Iskender considered, he could always declare in anguished tones that he had lost the way—a matter of no wonder in the pathless desert. And he still trusted that Allah, of His boundless mercy, would lead them straight to the gold.

But one night there came a sudden storm of wind and rain when they were encamped upon the summit of a rocky mound at the junction-place of two wild gorges. Their tent was blown away, and they were drenched to the skin. It was found impossible to raise the tent again because of the strong wind hurtling through the ravines. The rain soon ceased, however; they managed to protect the fire, and sat close round it, trying to make a joke of the disaster. But in the morning the Emîr's face had changed its colour, he kept shivering till his teeth chattered, and was very cross. Happily they had with them a supply of quinine. Iskender, who knew something of the ways of English people, administered a dose at once. He was for going back, seeing that the theatre of these misfortunes was a place remote from any dwelling; he warned his friend that they would find no village in the waste before them—nothing but scattered wells, and chance encampments of the Bedû, who might or might not prove friendly. But the Emîr announced his fixed intention to go on, whatever happened; and when Iskender ventured to remonstrate, told him angrily to hold his tongue. Was it likely he was going to turn back now, having come so far? He drank some whisky neat, and then felt strong enough to mount his horse.

They went forward miserably in the chill, wet morning. The sky was nowhere seen; damp mists obscured every feature of the landscape. The muleteer, with head wrapped up in a shawl, intoned a kind of dirge, pausing sometimes to ask Allah to improve his plight. The Emîr's teeth chattered and he cursed at intervals. But most hapless of all three was Iskender, who now knew that his lord

was bent on finding the gold, and valued the pleasant days already spent, their adventures by the way, their friendly converse, solely as conducing to that end.

About the fourth hour the sun made itself felt; the mists began to disperse, and depths of blue appeared. The afternoon was fine and, in the sunshine, the Emîr recovered cheerfulness. He apologised for his ill temper of the morning to Iskender, who strove to regard the stern resolve he had expressed to see the Valley of the Kings as likewise part of the attack of fever; but his mind misgave him.

That evening, after supper, the Emîr remarked that they had come an eight days' journey at the lowest estimate, so, by the guide's own showing, must be near the place. He spread out his map between them, and asked Iskender to point out its exact position. Forced to decide that instant, or arouse his friend's distrust, the poor youth breathed a heart-felt prayer to Allah for direction and, after some show of examining the chart, laid finger firmly on a certain spot. The Emîr then marked the place in pencil with a tiny cross, and reckoned up the distance by the scale provided.

"It is quite near," he cried. "We ought to be there to-morrow before midday."

He talked of nothing else till sleeptime. Iskender listened with an anxiety that was physical pain. He wished to Allah that Elias had been there to assure him that the place had real existence. Lying on the ground, wrapped in his coverlet, he spent the night in prayer. Allah is all-powerful; at His mercy all things are and are not; even if the valley lay not where Iskender had placed it, Allah could convey it thither in the twinkling of an eye; even if no such place existed in the world, Allah could create it as easily as a man can yawn. By dwelling thus in imagination on that Boundless Power, he gained at length a certain comfort in dependence such as the baser sort of slaves enjoy.

This mood of resignation was still upon him when he rose at daybreak. There remained nothing possible for him to do; and in the fresh morning, when the rocks in sight presented each its separate mass of living colour, he could not believe that the Emîr would quarrel with him, even if he knew the worst. The Emîr was a rich man; what did he want with gold? And had not Iskender proved himself his faithful servant? Surely the great one felt some love for him, sufficient to condone a little fiction which had been kept up simply for his Honour's pleasure.

But the Frank had his map before him in the saddle, and he more than once dismounted to consult the compass on his watch-chain.

After three hours they reached a plain of alternating sand and rocks, where nothing grew except some prickly shrub. On one side, not far off, a lake was seen, with many palm-trees mirrored in its tranquil waters. The Frank stared at it in amazement, remarking that it was not in the map. Iskender guessed it was mirage, and was soon confirmed in that opinion by the gradual disappearance of both lake and palm-trees. But the vision tended to reassure him, seeming a word from the Most High. If Allah, he thought, could thus imprint a perfect likeness of trees and water on the hot, still air, He would have no difficulty in painting a few rocks golden.

The sun was fierce. For miles they saw no shade, but only strange rock-ledges rising no higher than a doorstep above the sand, which grew low, prickly shrubs. A range of hills before them seemed hopelessly remote. Near the middle of this waste, the Emîr drew rein.

"The valley should be here," he said with finger on the map; and Iskender in the tension of his nerves was going to shout out "Praise to Allah," for the sand just there was full of shining particles; when the next words came and froze him to the marrow: "There's no valley; nothing but this beastly plain. Are you a liar?"

A trace of kindness or dry humour in his tone would have compelled Iskender to confess the truth, with self-accusal. As it was, he cried:

"Haf batience! Wait a minute! I had counted wrong. See, there are mountains! Surely the wady will be there among them." Inwardly he prayed Allah to make good his words, to save him from the scorn of one he loved so truly.

"Well, come on!" said the Emîr, with a shrug; and they toiled in silence towards the range of hills.

"You, who know the way, point out this valley," said the Emîr as to a dog, when they were near enough to observe the configuration of those heights.

Iskender pointed to what seemed an opening; but knew that his gesture carried no conviction. The Frank's cold looks askance at him deprived him of the power to play his part.

"We shall see," said the Emîr, urging his horse forward. At the entrance to the wady he dismounted, and Iskender, who was then some way behind, could hear derisive laughter. It was no valley at all. The shadow of a big projecting rock had been mistaken in the distance for an opening. The Frank was sitting calmly in that shadow when his friend came up.

"I can see no gold here," he observed politely; "but you have better eyes. Look well about you!"

Three parts unconscious, the unhappy youth obeyed. Alighting off his horse, he scanned the heights above, the ground at his feet, the sandy plain on which their mules were seen at a great distance.

"No gold! no gold!" he murmured idiotically.

"Give up this acting!" cried the Frank with vehemence. "Confess it was all a lie! Say why you brought me here. We are man to man just now, and may as well arrange our business before your friend the muleteer comes up. That missionary told me to look out for villainy."

Iskender bit the dust and wept aloud, calling on Allah to attest his innocence. To be accused of acting, when his heart was broken; to be suspected of a purpose hostile to his patron, when he would have shed his blood to bring a smile to that beloved face!

"Confess!" the Emîr repeated; and, hearing the voice of the Father of Ice, Iskender lied, as he had always lied, through fear, to that stern, upright man.

"No, it is true, sir, but we went wrong somehow. My God, it is true, sir; Elias said so too!"

"Elias is a liar.... Confess now that you never knew the way, and that your father never in his life saw any valley such as that you've so often described to me."

But Iskender would not admit that he had lied at all; to do so would have been to justify his patron's cruel scorn. Indeed, the fiction of the gold had grown so natural that he believed, even now, that it was partly true.

"You never knew the way; your father never left you any paper. It is pretty certain that he couldn't read or write. What a fool I was not to think of that before! If there were such a paper you would have it with you. Show it me!" the Emîr insisted.

Iskender appealed to Heaven against his lord's unreason. Was it likely that his mother, to whom it of right belonged, would let so important a document out of her own keeping? He had read it through and copied it, but lost the copy yesterday, he knew not how. It was owing to that loss that he had missed the way. His memory had played some devil's trick to shame him. The sand at his feet, the plain, the rocks beside him seemed all flame, reminding him poignantly of his vision of the place of gold. The air upon his face and hands was the breath of an oven, the sky a blackness overhead.

The Emîr rose and walked towards his horse. The contemptuous movement stung Iskender like a lash in the face. He clutched at his patron's raiment, sobbing and blubbering, imploring forgiveness for his one mistake. The Emîr beat him off with his whip, and, springing into the saddle, rode off slowly. Leading his own horse by the bridle, Iskender followed after him, with piteous appeals. Nothing mattered save their mutual affection. What was truthfulness as compared with human love? Appalled by the prospect of life, if deprived of his lord's regard, he put forward his limitless devotion as a claim for kindness, and fancied that his friend was listening, not unmoved. It was with disappointment that he heard again, in icy tones:

"You knew from the first that it was all a lie."

Nay, he protested, how could he be certain? He had not been alone in declaring that the gold was there; Elias had said so too. Why should he alone be made responsible?

The Emîr deigned not so much as to look on his despair.

Returning thus across the plain, they met the mules. The driver's mouth fell open at the Frank's command to turn back, just when they were near the limit of that arid waste and all the beasts were tired. It was some time before this man, Mahmûd, had mind for aught beyond his own complaints; but when at length he realised that Iskender, his good friend, was in disgrace, he also made entreaty for his pardon. The Emîr, with him on one side and Iskender on the other, took alarm. He laid his hand on the revolver at his belt, and commanded both to keep their distance.

Mahmûd with a shrug dropped behind, calling out to Iskender that it was the sun, and asking Allah to restore the poor khawâjah; but Iskender still adhered to his beloved lord, wishing that he would carry out his threat and shoot him dead. Then perchance his righteous anger would be turned to sorrow; he would regret the blind devotion of his willing slave.

A sudden shout from the muleteer made them both look round.

CHAPTER XXI

A swarm of mounted Arabs, shadows in the sun-haze, was careering towards them, leaving a dust-cloud trailing on the distant plain. Their lance-points glittered. They were nearing rapidly. Iskender stood gaping, awestruck at the sight, when a whip-lash scored his face.

"You infernal scoundrel!" snarled the Emîr through his clenched teeth. "So this is why you've brought me all this way. They made

it worth your while, no doubt. I might have guessed. That missionary warned me plain enough."

Iskender nursed his wounded face, and writhed with pain. For the moment he could neither hear nor think nor see.

The wild horsemen galloped in a herd to within a hundred yards of the travellers, when they fanned out neatly and surrounded them. The Frank had plucked out his revolver.

"Don't do that, sir, for God-sake!" Iskender shrieked. "You make them cross."

Still with hands pressed to his wounded face he blessed the assailants loudly, and asked how they did. For answer they told him to make his companion drop the pistol; which, when the order was conveyed to him, the Amir did sullenly. The Arabs then rode near, and stared in the faces of their captives.

They were a ragged-looking troop, clad every one in armour, were it but of leather. Queer helmets showed beneath their dirty head-shawls, and a few wore tattered coats of mail of high antiquity. Only their fierce bold eyes, strong spears, and clean-limbed horses kept the laugh from them. Their husky speech was full of words and phrases strange to Iskender.

When all had satisfied their curiosity, the throng rode off, leaving a sufficient guard to follow with the prisoners. Iskender learnt that they were surprised to find so small a company. Having heard of the approach of a great prince of the English, their chief expected to receive a visit from his Highness, with supplication in due form for leave to journey through his territory. When he learnt that the Emîr had entered his realm without so much as a salâm aleykum, he resolved to make the mannerless cub his guest by force. For this purpose he had sent forth all his braves in war trim, supposing that the English chief had power to match his insolence, only to surprise a train which a blind man could have taken single-handed!

Bitterly did Iskender curse his own vain-glory which had led him to boast at every village of his patron's greatness, and the absolute power which he wielded in the land of his birth. He was separated now from his dear one in the cavalcade, catching only an occasional glimpse of his back, which had a sullen hunch. He forgot the pain of his own face in fears for him.

At the end of an hour's slow riding, the barren waste gave place to slopes of coarse grass, where a number of camels, sheep, and goats were feeding peacefully. The camp of the Bedû appeared—a little town of black tents in a hollow, from which shouts, neighs, and much barking of dogs proceeded. Once there, Iskender lost sight of his Emîr, who, as the prisoner of importance, was taken straight to the chief's tent. He himself was left standing with Mahmûd among the tent ropes, in some peril from the heels of tethered stallions. A smell of hairy beasts defiled the air. Dark-skinned women and children came to stare at them. The girls expressed compassion for Iskender's wounded face, and cried shame on the man who had disfigured it, supposing him to be one of their own people. The muleteer, a Muslim, made profession of his faith, attesting the Unity of God and the Mission of Muhammad loudly, in the evident persuasion that his hour had come.

Iskender wondered what his lord was undergoing, and then as the day grew cooler, gave up thinking altogether, happy to lie down and rest. The women told him he was free to walk about, but for long he felt no call to use the privilege. At last, however, seeing his horse was tethered close at hand, he went and took from the saddle-bags his book and paint-box, and began to make a likeness of the scene; the women gathered round and cried: "Ma sh' Allah!" They took the lines and spots for magic writing, and gathered shyly round them, half expecting apparitions.

He was in this employment when men came in haste and dragged him to the chief's tent. He managed to stow the paint-box in his trousers, but the book was lost.

"Allah have mercy on thee, O Iskender!" groaned Mahmûd, as he was led away. "They have slain the khawâjah; now they come for thee. Well I am a Muslim, and resign my cause to God!"

In the tabernacle of the chief, superior only in size to the rest of the tents, the elders of the tribe were set in council, the Emîr before them. At the moment of Iskender's entrance there was a puzzled look upon each bearded face, directed towards the Frank in perfect courtesy. The arrival of an interpreter was hailed with exclamations of relief.

Iskender, having made obeisance, was invited to take a place in the circle. From the join of two camel's hair curtains screening an inner tent, he fancied he could see bright eyes of women peeping.

"Is this the great Emîr, of whom report has reached us?" he was asked. "And if so, how comes he to travel with so small a retinue?"

The Frank's eyes dwelt upon Iskender's face with an intensity of distrust that neighboured actual hatred. He still believed his friend in league with the marauders.

"It is true; he is an Emîr of the noblest, O my lords," Iskender answered; "but, may it please your Honours, he has not that wealth to which his rank entitles him. Indeed, for one in his position, he is poor."

The chieftains of the Bedû nodded comprehension, for poor Emîrs were not unknown among them. They murmured of compassion saying:

"May Allah make him very rich and powerful!"

But one objected:

"Why then does he travel? The rich among the Franks come hither for adventure and to rest their stomachs after too much feasting; their learned come to find out ancient ruins, and study the writings of the idolaters which are found here and there among the rocks. But why should this poor noble youth have wandered hither?"

"Aye, answer us that, O Nazarene! Why, why, and for what reason?" came the chorus.

Iskender found himself at a loss, being loth to revive his lord's anger by naming the valley of the gold in his hearing; he was looking up and down in the vain search for inspiration, when the Emîr himself came unexpectedly to his relief. With an ironical glance at the interpreter, the Englishman mustered all his Arabic and, turning to a sheykh who was his neighbour, asked:

"Is there a wady named Wady 'l Mulûk?"

"Wady 'l Mulûk!" cried all the elders in surprise; and then, in the twinkling of an eye, their foreheads cleared from all bewilderment. Wady 'l Mulûk! Ah to be sure! The vale in which lay scattered all the treasure of the ancient kings. So that was what his Honour came to seek!

Iskender was no less perplexed than was his lord by all this outcry, when the chief of all the tribe leaned towards him, saying:

"I understand. He seeks the Valley of the Kings," and touched his forehead meaningly. "May Allah heal him! The Lord forbid that we should plunder such a one, or detain him beyond his pleasure. All such are favoured of Allah! Be our guests from now."

And he gave his orders for a feast to be prepared.

All the old men fell to petting and caressing the Emîr, grieving to think that one so young and comely was spoilt for the commerce of life by a deranged intelligence. Iskender, too, they treated as a friend. Their original intention, they confessed, had been to hold his Honour up to ransom; but now they offered gifts instead of claiming them.

Iskender, the moment he could do so with politeness, went out and searched the camp till he regained his sketch-book. Mahmûd, the muleteer, called to him from the mouth of a tent where he was feasting as the guest of a tall Bedawi. He proclaimed the safety of their lives a miracle, attributable solely to the fact that he himself had not ceased to assert the Unity of God from the moment he was taken captive till men came and blessed him. All gave praise to Allah.

CHAPTER XXII

In the morning, Iskender's face had swollen where his lord had whipped it, half-closing one of the eyes. The chiefs of the Arabs cried out at sight of it and asked to know the cause of its disfigurement when their guests prepared to set forth in the morning under the escort of two armed and mounted tribesmen. He put them off with the story of a fall from his horse. The Frank glanced but once at his handiwork; and then looked down and bit his lip, contrition and annoyance at war in his demeanour. After riding long in gloomy silence, he inquired:

"What made them change?"

Iskender, wishing to take all the credit of the deliverance to himself, and at the same time to avoid mention of Wady 'l Mulûk, replied:

"I told them you are mad."

"You told them what?" exclaimed the Emîr from frozen heights of anger.

"That you are mad, sir."

A storm of abuse, couched in language he had never heard among the missionaries, stupefied Iskender, who had expected compliments upon his cleverness.

"You dared to tell them I was mad." The Emîr seemed thunderstruck. He presently announced his resolve to return at once to captivity; but Iskender with a courage unexpected by himself, assured him that would be to prove his madness. The palpable truth of this contention angered the Frank, like a blow. He flushed crimson and turned upon Iskender with whip raised.

"Leave me, you infernal fool," he cried. "Clear out, I say! Let me never see your cursed face again!... Don't grin, you ape! Get

out of my sight, or I shall murder you."

Iskender turned his horse and rode off slowly with many a backward glance of pure dismay. Who would have dreamt that his Emîr, the easiest of men, could ever be transformed into this raging tyrant? The tragedy of his own disgrace seemed insignificant beside the wreck of his dear lord's intelligence. For the Emîr was mad, not a doubt of it; Iskender had not lied in his report to the Arab sheykh. He went back till he met the baggage animals, then turned his horse and rode beside Mahmûd. The latter paused in his journey-chant to ask:

"What news, O my dear?"

"The Emîr has driven me away," Iskender blubbered. "He wishes never to see my face again."

"May Allah cure him of his illness! It is sure he is possessed with devils more than one! Be not so mournful, O my soul! After an hour, in sh' Allah, he will have forgotten anger."

"In sh' Allah!" Iskender echoed, weeping bitterly.

The muleteer resumed his road-song, and they fared along through a land of sunbaked rocks, where spots of shade were welcome to the eye as springs of water, the mule-bells clanging ceaselessly, until they scaled a ridge whence the whole rough sea of uplands could be surveyed. Their Arab guides had stopped here, clearly wishing to return, and were trying to make the Emîr understand their purpose by shouting in his ears.

"Go thou, Mahmûd, and hear what they have to say. Inquire the road of them and point it out to the Emîr," Iskender murmured.

He himself stopped short, fearing his lord's fresh anger. The Emîr had despaired him, however, and came riding towards him.

"What are you following for? Didn't I say that I had done with you?"

"Oh, sir!" Iskender burst into a flood of tears. "Haf mercy! Drife me not away! I luf you so! and how can I leaf you in this wilderness. You loose your way, and I—I die of fear!"

His tears and piteous words only displeased his lord the more. But it seemed to be the livid weal upon his face that quite incensed the Frank. The moment his eyes fell on that, his wrath leapt past all bounds.

"You lying, cringing cur!" he yelled. "Get out, I tell you! The sight of you's enough to drive one mad. If I catch you following again, I'll give you such a thrashing as you never had in all your life."

With that he gnashed his teeth and rode away.

Iskender remained where he was. The two Bedawis, departing, wished good luck to him, but swore that, for their part, they had liefer feed on prickly shrubs than serve so mad a master. He could hear Mahmûd objecting to go on without him, and the Frank commanding, threatening, till with a shrug the muleteer gave way, and shouted: "Straight on!" for Iskender's guidance. The clangour of the bells broke out anew.

Iskender waited till the little train was lost to sight, then followed miserably. His love was very ill, there was no doubt, and needed better tendance than Mahmûd, with the best intentions, could afford him. The muleteer could only, at the best, cook country food, while cleanliness and comfort were unknown to him. He could not make a bed or clean a riding-boot. Iskender clenched his teeth and swore it should not be. At all risks his sick lord must be made comfortable. So when, at sundown, he came in sight of the tent, he dismounted and tethered his horse out of sight, then walked up boldly. Mahmûd was at the fire behind the wind screen.

"Welcome, O my eyes!" he whispered, giving place. "Allah knows I cannot cook a Frankish supper; yet his Honour will not hear of thy return. Now, praise to Allah, he is sound asleep, being tired from the journey. Make no noise, however, for, if he found thee here, he might well shoot thee. He is very mad indeed; may Allah heal him!"

Iskender stayed and cooked a tempting meal out of the provisions given by the Arab sheykh. Then taking food and water for himself and his horse, he returned to his hiding-place, where, in the shelter of a rock, he spent that night.

In the dawn he listened for the sounds of starting, and heard the mule-bells die away before he mounted. He had saved a piece of bread, a date or two, on which he broke his fast at noon; and not long after saw the tent shine forth, white in the yellow landscape, beside the flat roofs of a village terracing a steep hillside. He recognised the place as one of those where they had rested happily upon the outward way. The sheykh received him in his house; his horse was cared for. Towards sunset he approached the tent. Mahmûd, from afar off, signalled that the coast was clear.

"The Emîr has wandered off among the rocks," he told Iskender. "There is no cooking to be done this evening, he has no appetite except for fruit and arac. His sickness tightens hold, it is well seen. Enter now, I pray thee, and make straight the bed. I cannot do it in the manner thou didst teach me. I myself must go into the village and buy fruit of some kind."

Iskender made the bed with loving touches, full of thoughts of his dear lord. He was finishing the work, when a shadow came across the sunset at the tent-mouth. The Emîr stood there as one transfixed with horror. Iskender clasped his hands, and drooped his eyes. An oath rang forth, a fierce hand clutched his throat, a whip descended on his back and limbs; it burnt like fire. Iskender, maddened, closed with his assailant, wrenched the whip from his hand and flung him off. The Emîr fell heavily. Iskender flung away the whip, and fled in terror.

What had he done? The Emîr was weak through illness. His known inferior in strength had thrown him easily. Iskender would have shed his life-blood to recall the blow, would have borne the beating to the end unflinching. He prayed to Allah that no hurt had come to his beloved. Returning after dark, he interrogated Mahmûd, who assured him the Emîr was just the same, no worse, no better. That was some small comfort.

Sadly he followed in his loved one's track, through places which had seen his former glory, secreting himself always in the village next to which the tent was pitched, and stealing forth at evening, when the Emîr rested, to cook the supper and consult Mahmûd.

"His madness grows much worse," the man informed him. "He throws things at my head and often beats me, because I cannot do things that are not my business, or fail to understand his words. My soul is angry sometimes, and I long to show my strength; but behind the weakest of these Franks there is the consul standing; and indeed it were a sin for any man to punish one so afflicted. His face is yellow, his hands shake. I often fear that he is going to die!"

"Allah forbid!" exclaimed Iskender fervently. It was his daily prayer that they might reach the town and its conveniences before his sickness quite disabled the Emîr. It seemed as if this prayer was to be answered. They had returned to within a few hours of their starting-place, and had pitched their tent upon the coastland plain at the foot of the hills, when Iskender one morning, in his hiding-place, listened in vain for the accustomed noise of starting. Alarmed at length, he quitted cover, and drew near the tent. Mahmûd sat out before it in the sunshine, cross-legged, and staring gravely at his mules, which were browsing the coarse grass. From time to time he pushed his turban back to scratch his head with a perplexed expression.

"Allah is merciful!" he exclaimed at sight of his friend. "The Emîr still lags a-bed. He will not hear me, though three times I have coughed from soft to loud in his presence, and knocked the chair against the table with progressive noise. His sleep seems troubled, for I hear him utter unknown words. God grant that he may awake refreshed and free from madness!"

Iskender advanced on tip-toe to the tent and entered its deep shadow. The Emîr turned on the small camp-bed and spoke his name affectionately. With a bursting heart Iskender flung himself upon the ground, confessing all things, asking pardon for his crimes. It was long ere he realised that his beloved was not present, that what had greeted him so friendly was the demon of delirium. His very marrow froze on the discovery.

Then, in that moment of his greatest need, his thoughts flew straight to his old foes, the missionaries. Though harsh and arrogant in times of health, they had not their like in the land for kindness when a man was ill. He told Mahmûd to take the horse of the Emîr and ride for his life to the Mission.

Having seen the messenger depart he went back into the tent, and sat down on the ground beside the sick-bed. He sullied his face with earth, and moaned to Allah. When some fellâhîn from the village near at hand became spectators of his grief, he asked them to provide fresh milk, a lot of it, having heard that milk was salutary in the treatment of a feverish illness. The milk was brought to him, with scorn of payment. He gave a cupful to the Emîr, and repeated the dose at intervals thereafter, with ceaseless prayers to Allah for his lord's recovery.

It was the third hour after noon when he heard foreign voices and the tramp of several beasts before the tent. The priest of the Mission entered gravely with the Sitt Carûlîn. The Sitt Hilda followed, looking fresh and tempting despite the sorrow painted on her face. Iskender sprang to greet them, giving praise to Allah; at such a time he had no thought of bygones; but the ladies turned from him in disgust; the Father of Ice bade him begone and hide his infamy. Going out in obedience to that harsh command he found a litter with two mules waiting in charge of Mahmûd, in addition to the thoroughbred horse of the missionary and the donkeys of the two ladies, which were guarded by Costantîn, the father of Asad.

"May Allah comfort thee, O Iskender!" exclaimed the muleteer fervently.

"May Allah have mercy on thee, rather," chuckled Costantîn malignantly; "for thou art like to suffer death for this last exploit!"

Iskender scarcely heard. He ran until he was out of their sight, and then lay down among some rocks and wept his fill. When he returned towards the camp an hour later, meaning to make himself useful unobtrusively, it was to find nothing left on the spot where all his interest in life had been so lately concentrated except an empty tin and some bits of paper. That, and the ashes of their last night's fire! He stood a long while staring fixedly at these memorials.

CHAPTER XXIII

More from subconscious attraction than from impulse Iskender trudged for hours across the wide coast plain till he reached the sandhills and beheld the house of the missionaries. It was then towards midnight, and the moon was rising. He sat and watched that house, with scarcely a movement, till the dawn came up, and the moon became a symbol in the lighted sky. With the cries of waking birds, with the return of colour, his blood flowed warm again. He arose, and turned towards his mother's house. The sun appearing as he reached the cactus hedge, he paused a moment to survey the well-known scene in that moment of transfiguration, when the sea caught light, and shadows stretched themselves luxuriously. He felt the paint-box at his breast with hope revived.

Through the open door he could see that his mother was at prayers, kneeling before the picture of the Blessed Virgin which he had painted for her long ago before he knew the way of it. From time to time she lowered herself upon her hands until her forehead touched the ground. He stood without upon the sand till she had finished.

Her first expression was of glad thanksgiving, as she ran and clasped him to her breast; then, in a trice, her voice resumed its ancient scold, with an addition of real anger.

"May thy life be cut short! What devil brought thee hither, of all places in the world the one where thy foes are most sure to seek thee? Fly, I tell thee! Fly, O accursed malefactor! They have complained against thee to the consul."

Iskender begged for food, which she could not refuse, though she produced it unwillingly, and stood over him while he ate, adjuring him, for the love of Allah, to make haste.

"O my terror, my despair!" she wailed. "All the slaves of power are out in search of thee. They have been here already, threatening me with torture. And the missionaries also have been here each day, maligning thee, and forcing me to join the hue and cry. They have spat their venom also on Abdullah, thy paternal uncle, even blackening his face with Kûk! The poor good man has been forced to return to his drunkenness. Have I not grief enough already that thou must needs fly hither and increase my terrors? What ailed thee to mislead the young Emîr? I warrant thou hast made no profit by it. And that fine treasure written to thy name, predestined for thee, hast brought back any of it, luckless boy?"

"I missed the way, O my mother. The Emîr fell ill; we were captured by the Bedû; all things warred against me."

"So I could have told thee! It is a judgment on thee for keeping secrets from thy loving mother!... For the love of Christ, make haste, have done with eating. If Costantin or one of the ladies were to catch thee here, or if the soldiers come and slay thee before my eyes!"

Something of her anxiety communicated itself to him. With the rest of the food in his hands he departed hastily. But after running for, perhaps, a hundred paces, he shrugged his shoulders and resigned his cause to Allah. On all hands homely objects wooed his gaze: a lone fig-tree down in a hollow, among whose branches he had perched and dreamed as a small boy; the path, now scarce defined, by which he went to school, choosing always to rush up the steepest part of the dune through excess of energy; the tamarisks round the Mission, and its high red roof; minarets and a dome of the town peering above the dark green wave of gardens. All looked so pleasant in the early sunlight, it forbade him to feel concern for his own fortunes. Even though, by cruel misconstruction of his motives, he were disgraced for life, all this remained to him. In attaching his desires to this he ran no risk of being wounded, as he had been by the human things he sought to love.

Strolling thus in reverie, he came upon the house of Mîtri with surprise. The thought of the priest as a protector at once occurred to him; for Mîtri was a favourite with the Muslim rulers, and the Orthodox Patriarch, his ecclesiastical head, could oppose a power almost consular to any attempt to persecute a member of his flock.

On the sunlit open space before the church, in the centre of which rose the ilex-tree, pigeons and a few lean fowls were pecking and dusting their wings, with rapturous coos and chuckles. No one appeared at the doors of the hovels, all of which stood open, nor did any voice but that of hens proceed from thence. But through the door-way of the little church came a sound of high monotonous chanting, interrupted at regular intervals by loud ejaculations from an audience.

Iskender pulled off his boots, and went in. The little nave was full of people, some standing, a few kneeling, the most part lying prostrate on the beaten earth which served instead of pavement. Through the door of the sanctuary, he could see the priest Mîtri, gorgeously arrayed, serving at the altar, bright with many candles which leaned this way and that without the least arrangement. Now he walked all round it swinging a little censer, now stopped before a largeish book upon a stand, reciting all the time in nasal tones. Nor was this all his business; for, except when the curtain was drawn at the moment of the Sacred Mystery, he kept an eye on the behaviour of some little boys who sat demurely on the doorstep of the sanctuary, and, catching one of them at some mischief, interrupted the service to fetch him a cuff on the ear and ejaculate, "Curse thy father, child of Satan!" Among those of the congregation who lay face to the earth, Iskender presently recognised Elias; and close to him, both standing, were Selîm and Daûd, sons of Mûsa. No one seemed to have remarked his entrance.

The service ended, all pressed forward to kiss the hand of the celebrant, and, having done so, one by one, streamed forth into the sunlight. Iskender soon thought himself alone in the church watching the priest put out the altar-lights. But suddenly out of the darkest corner a man rose up and made a step towards the sanctuary, with arms outstretched in fierce appeal; then cried aloud and, burying his face in his hands, ran stumbling out. Despite the untrimmed beard, the dirty clothes, Iskender recognised Abdullah, and a shudder ran through all his bones.

The priest, having disrobed, at length emerged from the sanctuary in his everyday costume of black cassock and tall cylindrical headpiece; when Iskender knelt before him with choice blessings, and implored his aid. In the shadow, with eyes yet dazzled from the radiance of the tapers he had just extinguished, Mîtri could not make out who it was, but holding the suppliant's hands led him up to the light. "Ma sh' Allah!" he exclaimed when he identified Iskender; and holding his hands more tightly, took him to his own house.

There, having sent his wife out on an errand, he called for Iskender's tale without delay, saying:

"I am much distressed on thy account; for the whole world speaks evil against thee. It is said that thou hast robbed and slain the English Emîr who trusted thee. A lie, no doubt; but still I fear for thee, for the common voice outcries the truth down here. Moreover, it is said that thou hast sworn falsely by the Blessed Sacrament; Yuhanna Mahbûb has vowed to kill thee for it. That is a heinous sin if it be true. Answer that first, before we proceed further. Art thou indeed so perjured?"

"No, O our father. By Allah, I swore truly when I said I knew of no treasure, as will appear from the full confession I now make to thee," Iskender answered, with eyes full of tears. He was going to embark upon his story when the figure of a woman closely shawled appeared before them in the doorway.

"May Allah reward thee, O our father Mîtri," cried his mother, as, stooping, she kissed the priest's black robe. "In pity save Iskender from those hounds of hell! All that they speak against him is a lie. It was the Frank led him astray, not he the Frank. I guessed he would fly straight to thee, the known friend and protector of the wronged, and my soul desired to be with him and hear his story."

Relieved of the fear of the missionaries which pervaded her own abode, she now embraced her son and, sitting beside him, took his hand in hers.

"Proceed with the story, O my son!" said Mîtri.

When all was told the woman wept aloud, exclaiming:

"Woe upon us! It is worse than was supposed. Iskender is a loser. Iskender is most innocent of all men living. Oh, who will show the truth to those who hate him? He has shown himself a fool—a perfect fool!"

Therewith she rose to go, explaining that she dared not stay another minute for fear the ladies of the Mission should go to the house in her absence, and grow angry and suspicious at not finding her. It was their usual morning for the visit. Once more she embraced her son, exclaiming:

"This is upon us from the hand of Allah, unto whom be praise! Yet—by the Gospel!—I had thought thee more intelligent!"

Having made sure from the threshold that no one from the Mission was in sight, she shuffled off along the burning road.

For some time Mîtri sat immersed in thought; while Iskender, on whom the business of narration had brought back despair, hid his face in his arm. At length the priest pronounced:

"In all thy conduct as related I discern no grievous sin, but only folly and a youth's wild fancies. The Franks will call thee sinful and a liar; but they, I think, have never known the youth which we experience—the warmth, the wonder and the dreams of it. The lad who has been taught to read, or fed with stories, is dazzled by the vision of the world, its sovereignties, its wealth, its strange encounters. He pictures himself a ruler or a lord of riches, and invents a store of marvels for his own delight; and that because he would admire himself, and cannot do so in the daily tasks and mean surroundings of his actual life. I myself, when at the seminary, considered the Patriarch's throne as mine of right, and should not have been greatly surprised to find myself installed there with my copy-book in my hand. But by-and-by the world enlarged. Its distances and depths appeared more clearly. I perceived how, in order to become a Patriarch, I must lead the monastic life, renouncing homely joys; and even thus stood little chance of gaining my desire, since all the chief among the monks are foreign Greeks who despise us sons of the Arab, and would keep us down. The face of a girl I loved soon exorcised ambition; and behold me a small parish priest, a friend and equal of poor fellâhîn. Now thy dream was to be a Frank in all save birth, to associate with thy Emîr on equal terms. To that end all thy follies were invented. The wish was foolish only, but to put it into practice, that was fatal to thee—a crime in all men's eyes! 'O dreamer, sit still in thy chamber, thou art a prince: air thy princedom, men will teach thee thou art an ass!' The world defames thee, as is only natural. It would have done the same for me, had I, a poor young student, actually claimed the honours of a Patriarch. Allah made thee a son of the Arabs. Accept the part allotted, and give up aping that which thou canst never be. The charge of perjury at any rate, is groundless as against thee. I will send word to Yuhanna, lest he harm thee. And now the moral is: I wish to help thee, but cannot well do so whilst thou art a heretic. Promise to let me baptize and anoint thee without more ado, and Allah witness I will make thy cause my own."

For the first time since their meeting in the church, the priest here smiled.

"I swear it," said Iskender; "though Allah knows I care not what becomes of me. I pray thee, tell my uncle Abdullah what I have told to thee, that his mind may be healed."

"That is useless, O my son; for I have reasoned with him. His grief is neither for thy deeds nor what is said of thee, but for some words thrown at him by the English missionary. He set such store by his respectability and the esteem in which the Franks all held him,

that now, in his humiliation, none but Allah can relieve his mind."

While thus expounding, the priest took up his staff and exchanged his thin house slippers for stout walking ones. With the last words he departed, bidding Iskender wait till he returned.

The youth sat still in dejection, hypnotised by the bright edge of sunlight on the threshold, seeing nothing else. He believed himself alone, when a hand touched one of his—a hand as cool and lissom as a serpent's skin. The daughter of Mîtri knelt on the ground beside him. She kissed his hand, and pressed it to her childish bosom.

"May Allah comfort thee!" she whispered. "Look not so miserable, I entreat thee, for it makes me cry. When my father sent my mother out, I hid behind the oven, and so heard thy tale. If it is true, thou didst well; and if it is false, I care not, thou didst well! Praise to Allah, thou art no longer a Brûtestânt; thou art one of us, and I can call thee brother."

Up to this point her voice was full of love; but when, awake at last, he tried to draw her to him, she cursed his ancestry and broke away. She had supposed him quite disabled by misfortune. Running fast across the space of sunlight, she sat down in the shade of the oak-tree, where he could still see her in the frame of the doorway, and fell to singing softly to herself.

She was still sitting there, at play with some glass beads, when her father returned.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Praise be to Allah!" exclaimed Mîtri, striding in and sitting down beside Iskender. As soon as he recovered breath, he told his story.

He had seen the secretary of the caimmacâm, and from him had learnt that the English consul was Iskender's chief accuser. Having no influence to oppose to so powerful an adversary except that of the Patriarch, Mîtri had decided in his mind to make appeal to His Beatitude, who was sure to feel kindly disposed towards a convert from Protestantism; when a message was brought to the functionary, whose manner changed at once. A telegram just received from the consul himself declared the young man guiltless of the crimes imputed to him. So pursuit was at an end.

Iskender thanked the priest, and praised his name. In the warmth of kindly treatment after many hardships, he cast aside reserve and caution as mere winter garments, and, the girl Nesîbeh being still before his eyes, kissed Mîtri's hand and owned his passion for her. Already he loved Mitra as a father. He prayed to Allah he might some day be in truth his son. That was his dearest wish, the one hope left to him. The priest regarded him with pure amazement for a space, then burst out laughing.

"Thou son of a dog!" he cried. "What words are these? Is this the season for such talk? The girl is young to marry. And thou art overbold, a youth with nothing! If thy mind is still the same, say three years hence, then let thy mother approach her mother, who, I think, would scorn such wealth as thou couldst offer. Now to talk sense. Thou canst no longer lodge at the hotel, though Selim and Mûsa have maintained thy innocence, and, for themselves, would still have welcomed thee. But Mûsa, their father, has forbidden it. He says, and justly, that thy dwelling there would bring discredit on the house just now, when every traveller has the tale of thy misdeeds and hates thy name. Come, and I will show thee thy lodging in the house of an old couple on whom Allah has bestowed male offspring only. It is but a step from here."

Again Iskender thanked the priest and kissed his hand. For the first time in his life he felt at home in his own land. The whole of the Orthodox community were henceforth his brethren.

On the next day Elias came to visit him, without malice for the past or the slightest recollection of ever in his life having slandered his good friend, now his brother in the faith. All his thoughts were of Wady 'l Mulûk. Had Iskender been there? No? Well, how was that? Iskender confessed that he had lost the description of its whereabouts, and his memory had played him false. They had been very near to the place, of that he felt sure; but the Emîr lost patience and refused to search any further. So, for lack of a little perseverance, all was lost, and the whole expensive journey made for nothing.

Elias listened with devout belief.

"A pity!" he explained. "But take heart, O my soul; thou and I will go together one of these days and examine that whole region. We shall find it yet, in sh' Allah!"

So obliging was his friendliness that he insisted on being a witness of Iskender's baptism upon the morrow. His presence, with the scarlet dust-cloak and the silver-mounted whip, astride of a prancing charger, reflected glory on the little group of peasants who trudged out to the nearest river, the priest with them. On the return there was a feast set forth in the house of Mîtri, and great rejoicing of the whole community. Elias was in boisterous spirits, boasting and telling strange stories; the sons of Mûsa discussed politics and the price of money with the rich Azîz; the priest made childish jokes and laughed at them; while the remainder of the party, mere

turbaned fellâhîn, swarthy-faced and rough-handed, ate heartily and applauded all that was said. The only death's-head present was Abdullah. Dismissed by Cook as a result of the aspersions of the missionary, he now proclaimed his intention to start business on his own account. But men shook their heads and winked aside when he talked of it. The testimonials which he vaunted as his stock-in-trade had been given to an elderly man of dignity and pronounced decorum, not to this mouthing sheykh of the dirty raiment and the visage ploughed by dissipation. On the present occasion he had no appetite for solid food, but sat apart morosely, tasting from time to time with manifest disrelish the light drinks provided. It seemed he wished to go, but lacked the strength of mind required to detach his person from so large a company. His head and hands kept trembling, and he muttered to himself.

Merriment was at its height when there came a knock at the door. The priest Mîtri opened, and exclaimed in glad surprise:

"Honour us, O khawâjah! Come in! Fear not! All my guests are honest people, and the occasion of our feast concerns thee nearly. We have this day reclaimed a Brûtestânt from the way of perdition. Would to Allah I might baptize thee also, O light of my eyes!"

The belated visitor would have drawn back at glimpse of so large a gathering, but Mîtri took him by the arm and brought him in. It was the preacher Ward, the humblest of all missionaries, who was sent about the country on the errands of the proud ones; a modest, pious man, who spoke good Arabic and scorned not to converse upon a footing with the natives of the land.

All rose upon his entrance. Old Abdullah straightened his frame to something of its former majesty, and said:

"Good efenin', sir!"

"I have come too late, I find," the small white-bearded clergyman remarked to Mîtri, who had forced him to be seated and set food before him. "I knew not that the baptism had taken place. My desire was only to ascertain that Iskender was earnest in this change of faith, and not impelled by anger at a treatment he conceived to be unjust."

"By Allah, no, he is the most sincere of converts!" responded Mîtri with his jolly laugh. "Have I anything to tempt a proselyte? Look round this room—with one beyond it, it is all my house—and compare it with the dwelling of the Father of Ice. Ah, no, my friend: this is a true conversion!"

"I ask you to belief, sir, that I haf nothin' to do with it," said old Abdullah angrily in English. "I suffer much from unkind thin's beeble say about me. They haf ruined me in my brofession."

Mîtri silenced the old man. With a Protestant missionary for his guest, the priest thought all words wasted that were not employed on controversial subjects.

"Thou art a good man, O khawâjah," he observed politely but with a certain malice. "Thou alone of all thy tribe wouldest deign to enter my poor house without arrogance, and sit down with my friends and neighbours in this kindly way; more especially this evening, when our gladness is at your expense. Tell me, I beseech thee, in what sense the others of your kind serve Allah by building palaces in the land, displaying a luxury unknown among us, and so tempting the weak and worthless of the Church to gather round them in the hope of gain. The Muslimin are unassailable, being the rulers; and the Latins are too strong and clever for them; so because their Honours must convert some one, being paid and sent here for the purpose, they take example from the Latins and turn on us, who are weak and not well educated. But how do they serve Allah in all this? Explain to me, O my soul!"

The visitor stroked his thin white beard.

"Are the schools nothing? Are the hospitals nothing?" he inquired.

"By Allah, it is true, they are much!" came in chorus from the company.

"But the charity might be greater if it were dissociated from attempts at perversion," submitted Mîtri with a show of deep humility.

The missionary reflected for a moment before he said gently:

"Your ideas and ours are widely different. When I was young I thought with others of my kind, and preached conversion zealously and from the heart. But now that I am old I sometimes think as you do, and ask myself what good there is in making proselytes. But Allah is above all of us; He alone sees the end. We strive, and others strive, for special objects, an all fail, or else find disappointment in success; but Allah uses our success and failure, and with them gains an object which we never saw. Look back, O my friend, a score of years, and tell me: Is not the intercourse between the divers sects and religions in this country more friendly than it used to be; has not each more regard for the other, while adhering more strongly than ever to its own creed? Is not this to be ascribed to the missionaries, who pass from one to the other, and cause them to compare their views, or at least investigate them; who, by their very attacks, as you call them, have done good, by forcing the attacked to look to their position and resources? The Muslimin, the very Jews, have grown more tolerant; they never stoned me now as heretofore. Strange indeed if, where faith assails faith in the name of Allah, Allah Himself should by that means produce general toleration, and an end to proselytising! Yet that is what is happening, it seems to me. The assaults of the Catholics and the Protestants upon your Church have revived her. Her priests are better in their lives; they begin to be educated; and, as a consequence, she holds her ground. I submit to thee that we have made few, if any, converts from

you in the last ten years."

"That is true," said Mîtri, greatly interested; "and by my life thou speakest like an angel. Nevertheless, there is but one true Church on earth; would that I might convince thee of her authority!... But thou eatest nothing! Taste this sweetstuff, I entreat thee; it is quite a delicacy!"

The rest of the company, finding the argument beyond them, were talking among themselves in lower tones. Only Abdullah, as a sometime dragoman, kept near the missionary, interrupting his speech with senseless scraps of English, all eagerness to translate for him the words of Mitri, till the latter stopped him with a curt "Be silent, fool!" And Iskender also hung upon the missionary, waiting an opportunity to inquire for the young Emîr. On a pause he thrust in his question; when the missionary, who had been smiling at a joke of Mîtri's, became of a sudden very grave.

"He lies at the gate of death," was his answer. "The doctor doubts if he will pass this night; but if he sees to-morrow's light, it means that he will live, in sh' Allah!"

"May Allah preserve the poor young man!" said Mîtri, and resumed the controversy.

But Iskender heard no more. He slipped out, unobserved, into the night, and stole down the sandy road through cloud-like orange-groves to where the sandhills rolled beneath the stars.

CHAPTER XXV

Iskender walked all round the low garden-wall of the Mission, staring through the feathery cloud of the tamarisks at the upper windows of the house, till he saw a light in one of them, when he sat down on his heels and watched it doggedly. He feared the blame which would attach to himself were the Emîr to die; still more the reproaches of his own mind; but above all things he was conscious of a return of his old devotion to the fair-haired stranger. He recalled the Frank's many kindnesses—in particular the splendid paint-box, which remained Iskender's own—and, sobbing, prayed from the heart that he might live. The hooting of an owl, or the bark of some dog in the distance, alone broke the stillness, of which the rustle of the tamarisks seemed part, so faint and vague it was. At moments, looking up at the stars, he could have deemed them living creatures, for they seemed to throb in time with his own grief.

He knew not how long he had sat there in the darkness unafraid, when the light in the room was moved. A chill smote his heart. He jumped over the wall and drew nearer, in the hope to catch some word of what was going on in there. Inside the hedge of tamarisk the air was sweet with flower scents, which floated thick and separate on the still air, like oil on water. He came beneath the window. The light was once more steadfast; so again he sat down on his heels and waited. Presently the tamarisks were disturbed by a cold breeze; they sighed aloud; the stagnant perfumes of the garden were confused and scattered; a whiteness came upon the wall before him, and the windows in it gave a pallid gleam. Having no desire to be caught lurking there by one of the servants, he was on the point of departing, when the light in the window was again moved, and while he stood in wonder what such movements of the light portended, a door close by him opened, and the Sitt Hilda came out into the garden. She was weeping silently, with no attempt to hide her tears. Iskender sprang to her.

"He is dead?" he moaned in Arabic. "May Allah have mercy on him!"

"He lives, the praise to Allah!" she replied, and with the words she wept more copiously, and turned from him to smell the clustered flowers of a certain creeping plant against the wall.

Echoing "Praise to Allah!" he withdrew.

She had not recognised him, had heard his question as the voice of Nature. It seemed to him that she had not answered it, but merely sighed aloud her own thanksgiving.

"She loves him!" thought Iskender, with a flush of sympathy.

He found strange rapture in the knowledge of her passion for the fair Emîr, in the prospect of a union of those two whom he had loved most of all people in his former life. They seemed in a sense his creatures, and their love his handiwork. If only he could help them to obtain their heart's desire, could serve their happiness by any means, and get forgiveness, he felt that he could enter on his new life without one regret.

CHAPTER XXVI

Each morning and evening Iskender walked upon the sandhills until he met with some one coming from the Mission who could give him the latest tidings of the Emîr. His mother spied him once from her house-door, and indulged in furious gesticulations to the effect that he must fly for his life. When he gave no heed she shook her fist at him, and opened her mouth wide to utter something, the sense of which was lost in the distance. She even came to his lodging, stealthily as of wont, and implored him never to walk again so near the Mission. It stopped her breath, and caused her deathlike palpitations to behold him there. The hatred of those children of abomination was so rank against him, that they might hurt his body. At the least they would wound his soul with indignities which she could not bear to think of for her boy.

"Hilda is the only one of them with any kindness; and she, I know, is always in the sickroom; she never now goes out beyond the

garden. The mother of George is absent; the preacher Ward has gone again. The others! They are known for devils, and they hate thee! What madness in thee to approach their house!"

When Iskender only laughed, she wrung her hands despairingly, and asked her Maker for deliverance from such a madman. Her apprehensions proved, however, quite unfounded.

The ladies Carülín and Jane were touched by Iskender's solicitude, and noticed him when passing on the road. Costantín the gardener answered his demands, though grudgingly; and Asad told him all he wished to know. The last named even condescended to remonstrate with Iskender on his change of faith, displaying the interest of a cultivated observer in the motions of some curious wild creature.

"I am a son of the Arabs," was Iskender's invariable answer, "and have no wish to seem to be a Frank. My religion teaches me to remove my hopes and ambitions from this world; and Allah knows I have experienced enough of its vicissitudes. All I ask now is leave to live and die in peace."

"That is beautiful, what thou sayest!" Asad would rejoin with his superior smile. "But wait a month or so till thou hast survived thy present grievance; then wilt thou wish that thou hadst done as I have. For, only think! I am to be sent to the land of the English to perfect my studies. There I shall take care to ingratiate myself with the great ones of their Church, and to wed some noble lady of their race; that, when I return hither, these people may be forced to treat me with respect, and no longer as their servant and inferior. I shall be a great khawâjah, receiving perhaps two hundred English pounds every year, whereas thou canst hope to be no more than a humble toiler at some trade or other. With the exercise of but a little self-control, thou mightst have been all this instead of me. Hadst thou but heard the voice of my good counsel, much might have been preserved to thee. Even now I would have helped thee for old friendship's sake. In the day of my power which is to come, in sh' Allah, it would have been easy to procure for thee the post of a teacher in some school or of lay-reader in some lesser mission. But thy espousal of a barbarous superstition, which no civilised and cultured person can so much as tolerate, has put it quite beyond my power to serve thee."

Iskender hardly listened to such talk. His mind found business in its own devices. He would have chosen to avoid the speaker altogether; but even Asad's unconcerned announcements, sandwiched in between gibes at the Orthodox faith were better than no tidings of his former patron. And Asad always lay in wait for him, delighting to dazzle one so downcast with the vision of his own high future. One morning he said:

"The uncle of the convalescent is expected to arrive to-day. He has come all the way from Lündra on hearing of his dear one's illness. It seems that thy sometime patron was ordered by the physicians to visit Masr, his health being weak. Growing weary of that land, where he knew no one, and wishing to extend his travels, he came on here and made the friends we know. This uncle, who is his nearest relative, cared not whither he went, so only that he was gaining health and strength; but hearing that his beloved lay at death's door, he hastened hither, mad with grief and rage. The Father of Ice has received from him a thousand costly telegrams, which demonstrate sufficiently his mind's disorder. It were well for thee to keep out of his way, for he will certainly vow thy destruction when he has heard the story."

After this warning Iskender saw no more of Asad for three days, the clergyman-designate being called upon to help in the housework. But he continued to walk near the Mission at sunrise and sunset; and at last, one evening, going there as usual, he found Asad sitting, Frank-wise, on a chair before the gate, devouring chunks of the sweetment called baclâweh, which the cook had given him. Espying the son of Yâcûb from afar, the friendly youth sprang up in great alarm and waved him off with frantic gestures, sweets in hand.

"Allah preserve thee, O Iskender; go back, O rash one! Did not I tell thee not to come again? Only to approach the house is certain death. The uncle of the poor sick man has sworn to drink thy blood, or at all events to beat thee senseless, in payment for the way thou didst beguile his nephew." Asad sat down again upon the chair, and ate another mouthful, then pursued: "The young man now is so much better that he is able, with assistance, to pace the garden. Yesterday it was the Sitt Hilda who supported him; but to-day it is the furious uncle, and the Sitt Hilda has red eyes. The uncle thinks her not well-born enough, or else too poor, to mate with his dear nephew. The young man has tired himself with pleading; but the old man locks his heart. And I am glad, for I myself would not object to marry Hilda when I am in holy orders. She is plump and shy and has fresh ripe-fruit cheeks that I should like to bite. Thou thyself didst love her once, I am aware; and Allah knows thou mightst in the end have enjoyed her by the exercise of a little self-control, by waiting humbly, as I do, till they made a priest of thee. At least, if I succeed in getting her, the Father of Ice, to whom she is like a daughter, will no longer be able to despise me, and keep me in dependence."

In spite of his first announcement of tremendous danger, Asad detained Iskender by the gate for nearly an hour, talking with him openly in full sight of the house. His discourse was chiefly of women, concerning whom he developed ideas purely cynical. He said that the daughters of the country were the more appetising, but that he himself would choose a daughter of the English to increase his consequence. If she possessed wealth or good looks, so much the better; but she must be English, and of an honourable house. As an English missionary, with an English wife of good family, how he would lord it here on a stipend of two hundred pounds a year! Iskender, being deep in thought of something else, made an excellent listener. Asad presented him with a small piece of baclâweh.

"At what hour does the Emîr take his pleasure in the garden?" Iskender asked at parting from that child of promise; leaving Asad to suppose he put the question out of caution, to the end that he himself might shun the Mission at that hour.

"Between the fourth and fifth after noon," was the reply. "But avoid the house altogether, if thy life is precious to thee! The foe, I tell thee, is a seasoned warrior, a drinker of blood from his birth."

From all that Asad had let fall, two facts shone forth: that the Emîr was mad in love with the Sitt Hilda, and that he was oppressed by his cruel uncle. Iskender mused on these, seeing a chance to help him and obtain forgiveness.

CHAPTER XXVII

Between the fourth and fifth hour after noon of that same day Iskender once more approached the house of the missionaries, this time with extreme precaution, keeping as far as might be hidden in the folds of the land, and, when obliged of necessity to cross a space of ground exposed to view, crawling on his belly, with his tarbûsh, which, being scarlet, was conspicuous, doffed and rolled up tightly in one hand. It was important for the enterprise he had in view that no one of the house should see him coming.

Having reached the garden boundary undiscovered, he stole round it, crouching, with his ear to the wall. Soon he caught the sound of voices, and, guided by them, reached a point quite near the speakers whence he could hear every word they were saying. The Emîr had just concluded what must have been a long petition, and now the uncle spoke:

"Need we have it all over again?" he inquired irritably. "You know I would not cross you in your present state, unless I were convinced it is for your own good. As I have before observed, she is a good many years your senior; she has neither birth nor money, nor anything uncommon in good looks. If, in eight months' time, you still desire it, I shall have no longer any right to forbid your marrying. But it shall not be now."

The tamarisks just there were a sufficient screen. Noiselessly Iskender surmounted the low wall and parted with his hands their feathery boughs till he could see the disputants. The uncle's face was richly bronzed, in striking contrast with his light blue eyes and heavy white moustache. Clad in a white suit, with a white pith helmet on his head, he appeared to Iskender like a portrait just begun, of which only the hands and the flesh of the face had yet been coloured by the artist. Of figure he was broad and upright, without a symptom of decrepitude unless it might be the stout cane he used in walking. The Emîr looked fragile and infirm beside him, pale with the trace of illness, and bowed by his present dejection.

"Pshaw! Bless my soul!" pursued the uncle, with a lively flourish of his cane. "Why, every man falls in love with his nurse if she's at all personable; it is a phase of convalescence. I could tell you of a dozen cases, within my own personal knowledge, out in India; but I never saw a happy marriage come of it. Now come, I only ask you to wait eight months until you are of age—you can't call that request unreasonable—and to stop all communications for the same period. It will give both you and the lady time to think about it, and save you both from rash and ill-considered action. Our good host here and the elder ladies quite agree with me. Now sit down on this bench and rest, while I go and get my notebook with the dates of sailing."

With that the old man went into the house, leaving the Emîr alone, resting forlornly on the garden-seat beneath a flowering tree and staring at the ground. Iskender parted the growth of tamarisks and stood out before him.

The Emîr gave a start and a faint cry, with eyes dilated. Iskender pounced on his hand and, murmuring words of love, essayed to kiss it. It was snatched from him.

"What the devil are you doing here? Get out, I say!" The Frank spoke low and angrily, with a glance at his hands which cursed their present helplessness. "If I were not so confoundedly weak, I would send you flying over that wall!... Oh, yes, I suppose I forgive you, and all that. Only I don't want to speak to you, or see your face. You've got to be a kind of nightmare to me. I daresay I misjudged you; I don't pretend to understand you; in some ways you behaved quite well and honestly. Only I can't endure the sight of your face, the sound of your confounded voice. Get out, I tell you."

But Iskender came close, and, despite his efforts to repel, leaned over him and whispered in his ear:

"Just listen, sir! I bring her to you where you like—to England?—to America?—anywhere you tell me. Gif to me a bit of writing, for me to show to her—you know!—to Miss Hilda, her you luf! The old man is a fery wicked deffil to wish to sebarate you."

"So you have been listening, have you?" said the Frank, with a mirthless laugh. "Just as if you hadn't done enough already in the way of meddling with my affairs. Go! and may I never see your face again. You will make haste and begone if you're wise. My uncle will be back in half a jiffy."

But Iskender was too astonished by these words, and the listless manner of their utterance, to trust his understanding. He went on entreating:

"Just a word in your handwriting, sir, so she can know it's all right. I bring her to you anywhere at my exbense. God knows I do anything to please you! I treat her honourably, sir; I be her servant like as I'f been yours. All that I told you about me and her was

nothin'; I was just a silly boy. I respect her, sir; I be her slave; you trust me. By God, I treat her like as if she was the Blessed Virgin! It will cost you nothin', sir; I bray you do not doubt——"

But he got no further, being suddenly collared from behind, and beaten with a cane which stung like hornets. Screaming under the punishment, and struggling hard, he at last succeeded in breaking away just as Costantin came running round a corner of the house and terrified faces appeared at its lower windows. He heard his assailant, panting, exclaim, "That's the only argument the beggars understand. We learnt that in India," as he (Iskender) dashed through the hedge of tamarisks and cleared the low wall at a bound.

With mouth full of sobs, he ran across the sandhills, every salient object, every shadow, swelling and sinking with the horror of each breath he drew. It was not that the old afrit, the uncle of the Emir, had beaten him, nor that his back was sore, but that the Emir himself had refused his services, which so appalled him. He felt like the spectator of some ghastly crime. Surely no man really in love would question by what means he got his dear, so only that she was brought to him with despatch and decency. It was a catastrophe hardly less than that of the gold. Even in love—the fierce, unreasoning passion of a youth for a maid—it seemed a Frank must differ from a son of the Arabs. Once more Iskender had erred in attributing to the Emir his own sensations, and been punished for it as for an offence unthinkable. Once more he gazed into a soundless gulf, impossible to bridge; and was appalled.

Seeing a convenient hollow close before him, he plunged into it, and had flung himself down to think and fetch his breath, before he knew that it was already occupied. A sudden burst of music with the strains of the English National Hymn was the first announcement he received of the proximity of Khalil, the concertina-player, and of his own uncle Abdullah.

"Welcome, O Iskender," said Khalil, when the tune had finished with becoming gravity. "I come out here to play my music undisturbed. And Abdullah follows me through love of the strange sounds, which soothe his mind's disease."

"May Allah preserve thee in happiness, O son of my brother!" said Abdullah gloomily. "But thy folly has brought ruin to my house. Our Lord destroy those children of iniquity who slandered me in the ears of Kuk."

"Take heart, O my soul! Be not so downcast!" pleaded the musician, who was all urbanity, doing the honours of his one accomplishment there in that lonely hollow of the sands for all the world as though it had been a fine reception-room, and they his guests. "Stay, and I will play to you both the air of 'Yenki-dudal'—a noble air, none like it, and of wide renown. So shall Abdullah cease from brooding on misfortune."

This Frankish music hurrying to an end, of a rhythm monotonous as the hoof-beats of a galloping horse, seemed very ugly to Iskender. How different from the delicious waywardness of Eastern airs, whose charm is all by the bye, in precious dawdlings and digressions! It revealed to him the mind of his Emir. Gradually, as he listened to it, grief fell from him; and in its stead rose hatred for a race that measured all things, even the sweet sounds of music, even love. He remembered only that his back was sore.

CHAPTER XXVIII

That night Iskender still endured distress of mind. Anger and fierce hatred of the Franks overcame him whenever he recalled what had happened in the Mission garden, and the recurring smart of his wounds prevented his forgetting it for more than a minute at a time. But in the morning, when pain had given place to a bruised stiffness, he recovered the resignation which had been his before the preacher Ward came with the tidings of his Emir's great danger. For the first time since his return from the search for Wady'l Mulük he took out his paints and sketch-book, and went and sat beneath the ilex-tree, awaiting inspiration. But the buzz of flies, of bees, and other insects inseparable from the creamy morning sunlight set his mind afloat, and prevented its settling on any one object.

In this happy state of indecision he was found by Asad son of Costantin. That high-minded youth had come, as he explained, at no small peril to himself, solely to warn his dear one to beware of ever coming near the Mission. The indignation of the missionary and the ladies with his conduct of the day before was intense; and no wonder, for from the excitement consequent upon that scene in the garden the Frank was back in bed again as ill as ever. All, to the very servants, blamed Iskender; while as for the uncle of the sufferer, that ancient blood-drinker had sworn to cut the son of Yacub into little pieces, and give his meat to dogs—a form of punishment, Asad explained, which the terrible old man had practised daily while in India at the expense of the native inhabitants of that unhappy country.

"Wallah, he is a veritable ghoul; he is more blood-thirsty than the worst among the Turks. Did I not warn thee of his state of feeling? What ailed thee thus to rush into his arms?"

To all this Iskender's sole reply was:

"Allah is bountiful!"

"But wherefore risk thy body in his presence? Tell me, O my soul, what imp possessed thee?" pleaded Asad in his most seductive tone. His curiosity was real, and very great. "All demand to know. That old ghoul vows he caught thee begging money of thy former

patron—the Emîr, we used to call him, who is no more an Emîr than I am, it turns out, but only the son of a merchant in the city of Lûndra—but I cannot believe that he speaks truth in this. Inform me of thy motives, tell what really happened; then I can defend thee. Is not my discretion known? Have I not always stood thy friend? By Allah, I will keep the matter secret, if that is thy desire. Tell me, me only, O my soul—thy brother Asad!"

Still Iskender only answered: "Allah is bountiful!" In truth the tidings of the Emîr's relapse concerned him not at all. He murmured in his soul, "May Allah heal him!" as he would have prayed on hearing of a stranger's illness, but with no sense of guilt or responsibility. To have opened his heart to Asad would have been to risk destroying this blissful state of indifference. He feared to revive his emotions of the day before; so confined himself to pious exclamations.

Asad's inquisitiveness, however, was of a hardy kind. Again and yet again did he return to the charge, pleading, remonstrating, even threatening; holding out every inducement he could think of; even offering the fine penknife with three blades and an ivory handle, which had been given to him only yesterday by the Sitt Jane. He held this treasure up before his patient's eyes, opening the blades one by one to display the glory of it. But Iskender still sat on composedly, smiling into distance, like a graven image. Finding he could elicit nothing, Asad grew angry.

"Thou art still at thy childish toys, I see," he sneered as he at last withdrew. "Much they will profit thee! Ma sh' Allah! I can see how thou wilt envy me hereafter when I am a grand khawâjâh, and thou art dirt in the road!" Having attained a safe distance, he let fly his farewell shaft: "Cursed be thy religion, O dog son of a dog!"

Iskender then glanced round in the hope that some others of the Orthodox communion might have heard the insult, in which case it would have fared extremely ill with the son of Costanfin. His heart leapt with joy at the sight of Elias close at hand armed with his fine silver-mounted riding-whip. But instead of pursuing Asad, who had taken to his heels, and of whipping the life out of him, Elias contented himself with throwing a stone and celebrating in a loud voice the immodesty of Asad's mother and the revolting manner of his conception and birth. That done, he came and sat beside Iskender.

"I have killed a man for cursing our holy religion before now," he remarked, smiling; and proceeded to give an outline of the murder. But this was not the object of his coming. He had obtained command of a party of American travellers, men bound for Wady Müsa, and, remembering that the valley of the gold lay somewhere in the same direction, had come to ask Iskender to join the expedition in the quality of cook. These khawâjât knew nothing of the country, Elias could conduct them by what road he chose; might even keep them encamped in one spot for days, if necessary, while he and his dearest friend explored the neighbourhood.

"Say yes, O my soul!" he entreated. "It is an opportunity that may not occur again. In sh' Allah, we shall come back each as rich as the Sultan's Majesty. Without thee, I am nothing; for thou alone art in possession of the knowledge to ensure success. We set forth to-morrow. Make all thy preparations now directly, and come with us!"

Iskender refused, vowing by Allah Most High that he had had enough of desert travelling to last a lifetime. At that the chagrin of Elias was pitiful to witness. He saw the valley full of gold, which the second before had seemed quite close to him, removed by this reply a great way off. But when Iskender offered to describe its whereabouts to the best of his remembrance, and to make over all his rights in it to him (Elias), confiding in his far-famed generosity, the seer's lips parted and his eyes started out from his head with astonishment and delight. Whipping out his grand pocket-book, he took down hurried notes while Iskender thoughtfully reviewed his route with the Emîr, naming every village and outstanding mark upon the road, as also the precise point at which he believed that he had gone astray.

"It was there that my memory failed me. I should have borne more to the southward. But even as it was, we must have been within an hour of the place, when the Emîr—curse his father!—gave the fatal order to turn back. Forget not, O my soul, to bribe the chief of the Arabs in that district, who is surnamed Son of the Lion; or he will certainly oppress thy party as he did mine."

Elias, having replaced his note-book, flung both arms around Iskender's neck and kissed him on the mouth repeatedly. Tears rolled from his eyes. He whispered fiercely:

"Never will I forget this deed of kindness; I will pay thee half the treasure—by my head I swear it, by my honourable reputation, by my hope of life hereafter! Allah knows I always loved thee! May Allah destroy those wicked people who spread abroad foul lies concerning thee. Only let them dare to come within reach of my two hands!"

The transport past, he sat beside Iskender, with arm about his neck. Some girls at a round game in the shadow of the church caught his wandering eye. He called his friend's attention to the good looks of Nesîbeh, who was one of them. Iskender turned his head and threw a careless glance in the direction indicated.

"Thou hast not seen her properly. Wait a minute!... O Nesîbeh! O my pearl! Come hither!... Ah, the rogue has fled to hiding; she has slipped inside the church; and the rest, her playmates, are flying, each to her mother's side, as if my sweet-toned voice had been a lion's roar! A year ago she would have flung herself into my arms, and sat upon my knee and begged for stories. But now she wears the veil, she is a woman, and therefore must be captious like the rest of them. In thy grace I depart, having much to put in order for to-morrow's journey."

Once more he flung both arms around Iskender's neck, kissing him on both cheeks and on the mouth, and vowing by Our Lady,

and by the three Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, to repay him half the treasure of the Valley of the Kings.

CHAPTER XXIX

Left alone, Iskender took up a position in which he could watch the open door of the church without seeming to do so. Then, as soon as he beheld Nesîbeh peeping out, he opened his paint-box, laid his sketch-book on his knee, and made believe to set to work in earnest, crooning a facetious song the while, to complete the deception. His object was to tempt or provoke the girl to come to him. For days past she had withstood all his allurements, taking to her heels at his approach. He desired an explanation of such queer behaviour, and, having learnt that frankness was of no avail, resorted now to subtlety.

After a space of apparent absorption in his work, he hazarded a glance out of the corners of his eyes, and was glad to see that she was drawing nearer. From the glimpse thus obtained he judged her discontented, sullen, even angry, and suspected some hostility to be the object of her stealing up behind him. But he was quite unprepared for what actually happened. A large stone, flung at close quarters with all the strength of her young arms, struck him fairly between the shoulders, just where the bruises resultant from yesterday's beating most thickly congregated. It knocked all the breath out of his body. The shock, however, stood him in good stead; since it prevented his acting on the first angry impulse of retaliation, and at the same time gave him a look of genuine anguish. In a trice she was at his side, weeping and imploring his forgiveness.

"Say thou art not badly hurt—say it, I implore thee. By my life, I should die if I had injured thee."

Iskender did his best to personate the last agony, writhing and rolling his eyes, and clutching at the air with palsied hands. In despair of soothing one in that condition, she changed mood swiftly and became defiant.

"No matter," she sneered. "Thou art not hurt to death; and by Allah thou deservest any suffering in return for the shame and humiliation thou hast put upon me. What was that Frank—curse his religion!—to thee, that thou must go every hour only to watch the house where he lay ill? He had cast thee off, when I came and comforted thee. Yet is he dearer! O the disgrace to me to have offered my love and to be thus rejected! Would to Allah I had never seen thy dirty, ugly, wicked—thy accursed face! It is the face of a pig, of an afrit; so now thou knowest! What had I ever done to harm thee that, after speaking to me of love and asking for me, thou didst turn thy back and spurn me for the sake of a vile foreigner who has blackened thy face and made of thee a byword for infamy? I heard thee ask my father; and I heard his answer. There was hope for thee. Why has thy mother never come to talk with mine? By Allah, I will take that stone again and kill thee with it; for it seems that I am nothing in thy eyes, O misbegotten!"

Iskender knew not how to answer, for her reproach was righteous; yet he loved her dearly. He was released from this embarrassment by the return of Mîtri, who had been into the town to visit a sick man. He had drawn quite near before the bickering pair perceived him. Nesîbeh made as if to fly indoors; but the priest called her back rather sternly.

"Art afraid of me, thy father, child of mischief? By the Gospel thou hast cause to fear, O shameless, O deceitful. But wait a minute, I command thee, and hear what I have to say to this young man."

The girl obeyed demurely, standing by, with hands folded in the fall of her white headveil while her father addressed Iskender.

"It is known, O my son, that I have conceived a fondness for thee; and so it seems has this wild girl of mine. The mother of Nesîbeh, too, speaks well of thee, because thou dost run her errands, and art fond of playing with the younger children—things which seem naught to me, but please her greatly. I say not that I will not give Nesîbeh to thee, some day in the future, if thou walkest straight. At present she is very young; and thou hast yet no trade by which to gain a livelihood. Now I have been thinking; Allah has bestowed on thee a rare and wondrous gift, which is, to make flat likenesses of all things that thine eyes behold. There lives in El Cuds a sheykh of my acquaintance—a righteous man, and steadfast in the faith—who earns his living, and a fat one, by no other means. He makes the icons and religious pictures for many of our monasteries and great churches. Often, in old days, when I was at the seminary, have I watched him shape the blue and crimson robes and spread the gold like butter. I will write a word to him and, maybe, pay a trifle, that he may receive thee as his disciple. Devote thyself to his instruction and soon, with the grace of Allah, thou wilt far surpass him in accomplishment. Then, after a year or two, return and speak to us of marriage. We shall hear thee favourably. Have I said well, O my daughter?"

The child was silent. The weight of her father's words had stilled and solemnised her, removing every trace of coquetry. Her head was bowed as at the benediction; she was sobbing. Mîtri patted her head and bade her run indoors.

"There is yet another reason," he told Iskender privately, "why I would defer the nuptials for a year or two. Did thy wedding with my daughter follow close on thy conversion, scoffers would see in it a clear inducement, would say that I bribed thee with my flesh and blood; and that would grieve me. Go away, therefore, for a reasonable time; let the noise of thy conversion die away; and all is said."

So it was arranged.

CHAPTER XXX

On the day when the Emîr set sail for England in the custody of his forbidding uncle, Iskender, with the sum of two mejîdis in his pouch, set out on foot for the Holy City. On his way to join a horde of Russian pilgrims with whom, by Mîtri's advice, he was to walk for safety, he saw the carriage belonging to the Hotel Barûdi, conveying the two Englishmen to the gate of the town. The carriage passed him from behind; its inmates must have had him long in view, the road being empty; yet the Emîr deigned never a glance at him, but laughed and talked, as if enchanted, with the horrible old ghoul who sat beside him. Iskender called down curses on their race, and hastened on to find his Russian pilgrims.

These were peasants, men and women, for the most part old, with faces gnarled and knotted like the trunks of ancient olives, and pale eyes which had a patient, rapt expression as if they saw Heaven opened, but a long way off. They took no notice of Iskender there beside them, though his adherence was conspicuous as a flower among grey rocks, but trudged onward, singing hymns in a strange tongue.

The general rate of advance was very slow, so many aged, feeble folk were of the company; but some three hours after noon of the third day, having toiled long through a wilderness of stony hills, they saw the city. Men and women kissed the ground, weeping and crying aloud. The priests in charge of the pilgrims struck up a psalm of thanksgiving.

Iskender left them at these devotions, passing on into the city. There he lost all purpose and the count of time in rapture with the colours of the motley throng, which budded in the night of long, dark tunnels and blossomed in the open alleys, full of shade. The sense of an infinitude of burning light, resting above, gave to the shadow and its bedded splendours something magical, reminding Iskender of his childish fancies of what it must be like to live at the bottom of the sea. He had stood for a long while glued to the pavement of a certain entry, outside the jostling crowd, gazing entranced at the shop of a coppersmith across the way—where, in the darkness of a kind of cave, the burnished wares gave forth a bluish gleam like negro faces—when some one smote his chest.

There was Yuhanna the dragoman, his old enemy, grinning down at him, for once quite friendly.

"Shrink not, O my son, fear nothing," he said, laughing, when Iskender half retreated. "Thou didst not perjure thyself, it seems, that time thou knowest, so I have no grudge against thee. And now thou hast joined the Church, thou art my brother. I heard the blessed news from one I met upon the road. Art thou not happy to be now a child of light, delivered from the prospect of everlasting damnation? Wallah, it is bad to be Brûtestânt."

He gave Iskender's arm a cunning twist, just enough to suggest the torture in reserve for heretics; and then, detaining his hand inquired the nature of his business in the city. Thus reminded of his errand which had quite escaped him, Iskender confessed that he was in search of the shop of one İbrahim abu Yûsuf, a painter of religious pictures. Yuhanna told him it was close at hand, and, having treated him to a cup of coffee and some sticky sweet-stuff, showed him the way, which could hardly have been found without direction. Through a deserted alley, down first one dark, stinking passage, then another, Iskender reached a crazy door and, knocking on it twice, was told to enter.

The room within was small and very dark. It had only one window, high up in the wall, and even that looked out upon a covered way. When Iskender entered, the artist was in the act of rising from his knees, having been on the floor at work upon a picture. He was a wizened elder with a fine white beard, clad in a soiled kaftan, black turban and big black-rimmed spectacles. Lighting a candle-end he read the letter of the priest Mîtri, and, having read, embraced his new disciple. He took off his spectacles, brushed them, wiped his eyes repeatedly, and then knelt again to his painting, bidding Iskender watch the way of it. When the youth suggested that more light was needed, İbrahim abu Yûsuf shook his head decidedly. This room, he explained, had been chosen precisely on account of its obscurity, which meant seclusion. Were he to ply his trade in the light of day, the Muslim zealots of the city would speedily tear him in pieces as an idol-maker. "Though some of them make pictures also," he explained, "not here but in Esh-Shâm and other places. They quote in excuse some fetwah of the learned. I have no appeal; for did I quote their fetwah they would call it blasphemy." The room, he said, possessed advantages for health as well as privacy. Its window gave upon the market of the shoemakers, and, when it stood open, admitted the smell of leather, than which nothing in the world is more wholesome and invigorating. Iskender was glad to learn that he was not required to sleep there, but in the private house of his master, whither he was conducted at the end of the day's work. The old man and his wife seemed pleased to have him in the room of their only son, an adventurous youth who had gone with merchandise to America to seek his fortune.

The Sheykh İbrahim took great pains with his pupil's instruction, and taught him divers little tricks which saved much trouble.

"But times are bad!" he would suspire in moments of depression. "Once it was a profitable trade; all the pictures required used to be wrought and purchased in the land. But now the majority of the clergy buy them ready-made from Europe. That the Franks have a pretty, life-like trick is undeniable; yet I think our ancient style, stiff and conventional as they call it, is far more reverent. There is no

one left to practise it, nowadays, except myself, and here and there a religious in the monasteries."

Yet, for all the old man's moan, there seemed no lack of business; and Iskender wished that he had half the money which he saw paid into his master's hand. Monks and nuns and priests, and even prelates, found their way to the cell of the painter; and Iskender's work was highly thought of by such visitors. The old man was laughingly told to look to his laurels, for the young one at his side had almost Frankish talent.

"Heed them not, O my soul!" said Abu Yûsuf. "They speak as fools who know not. That the Frankish way has merits, all must allow; but ours, I do maintain, is more devotional. Let it be one thing or the other; that is all I ask. And I would have thee purge thy style, once and for all, of just those lifelike touches which these fools admire."

Iskender, of sheer laziness, was content to humour the old man; and soon acquired such skill in practice that he could have wrought with his eyes shut, as the Sheykh Abu Yûsuf virtually did, for he was almost blind. Every morning, before setting to work, he hastened to the Church of the Resurrection and said a prayer there, kneeling at the tomb of Christ, ere studying the paintings which adorn its dim old walls. At the end of a year and a half his work was in greater demand than that of his master. The latter, recognising that his hand was failing and his sight would soon be gone, offered to sell him the business. But Iskender had no money for the purchase. He consented, however, to a scheme of partnership; and, proud of his achievements, sent a letter to the priest Mîtri, announcing his return to claim his bride. After four days came the priest's reply, to the effect that preparations were being made for the wedding; upon receipt of which Iskender set forth on his journey, mounted upon an ass, and accompanied by two wealthy Christian merchants of El Cuds, new friends of his, who valued his acquaintance. Their escort won him standing in his native town.

CHAPTER XXXI

The bridal was attended with festivities. The little Christian village re-echoed with the ululation of the crowd of women forming the bride's procession, as they paraded their joy among the hovels before going to the church. And when, after the ceremony, the train came forth, carrying Nesîbeh to a house not her father's, the zaghârît broke out afresh, and guns and pistols were discharged. Much feasting of a solid kind ensued at the bridegroom's expense, in a house which had been ceded to him for the purpose. Elias was there in gorgeous raiment, telling all who would give ear a strange romance of how he had once been all but married to a royal princess. Khalil, the concertina-player, was a thought aggrieved that Mîtri forbade him to make music in the church itself, but forgot his dudgeon when the crowd trooped out again. For hours he played on indefatigably, repeating his whole repertory of Frankish discords at least a score of times, and telling all who asked that he had acquired his skill in foreign music by instruction from the greatest living master of the art—a certain English mariner named William.

Of Iskender's family not one was present. His mother dared not adventure, for fear of the missionaries; and his uncle Abdullah lay at that time ill in his house as the result of a wound received in a drunken brawl.

It was not until two days later, when Iskender was beginning to overcome the shyness of his young bride, that his mother came to bless him.

"Ah, thou hast won for thyself a pearl of price, my son, a gem desired of many!" she whispered in his ear, when she had embraced Nesîbeh. "Be careful of her goings, guard her closely; for it has reached my ears that she is ripe for naughtiness. May Allah, of his mercy, bless the pair of you, and grant you honoured increase."

Congratulation, however, was only part of her purpose in the visit, as soon appeared.

"My son," she cried excitedly, "the great lady, the mother of George, has come hither from the land of the English, for a few weeks only, having left the children. She had ever a fondness for thee, and has asked to see thee, as I hear from the servants at the Mission. Even when informed of all thy misdoings by the Father of Ice, her husband, she smiled in his face, they tell me, and still protested she would like to see thee. So I threw this shawl over my head, and came to fetch thee to the house. The mother of George loves thee, as I said before; and her husband denies her nothing, both because she comes of a good house, while he is the son of low people, and for the sake of the many children she has borne him. By the Gospel, I perceive a chance for thee to retrieve the past, if only thou wilt deign to be a little politic and respect their foibles. For Asad son of Costantin is in the land of the English, and the report of his doings displeases the Father of Ice. It is said that he shows a tendency towards the High Church in that country, which for the time is uppermost, and has found some favour with its dignitaries; which means he is accursed in the eyes of our friends here.... What art thou doing? Come, make haste, I say!"

Iskender, on his knees upon the floor, was looking through a little pile of paintings, his own work.

"I would take in my hand a gift for the mother of George," he explained; "a specimen of my art, that she may see what proficiency I have attained in it. It was she who first encouraged me to draw and paint—she and, after her, the Sitt Hilda. I should like them both to see the beauty of my present paintings."

"Now Allah forbid!" exclaimed his mother in alarm. "Verily thou art mad to think of it. They view with horror all religious pictures, regarding them as idols, in their ignorance, like the Muslimin! Here is a chance to recover all their favour, to supplant Asad, to become a priest of their religion, a rich khawâjâh; and lo! thou wouldst spoil it all by showing them a holy image! When thou askest aught of the Devil, make not the sign of the Cross. Be wise, my son; and come at once!"

But Nesîbeh, who had till now stood speechless by, here flung herself between them, threatening to tear the eyes out of the mother of Iskender. She swore that she would never let her husband visit the home of disbelief in the company of one so wicked. If he went at all, let him take the holy picture to protect his spirit from pernicious influence.

"Tush! tush! thou silly babe," the elder woman chid her, "were it not better for thee to have for husband a rich khawâjâh than a wretched painter of religious pictures? Thou wouldst wear fine Frankish clothes of wondrous texture and hats, I tell thee, hats with waving feathers. Thou wouldst sit at ease all day, with maids to wait on thee."

"I want none of it," screamed Nesîbeh. "These are devil's wiles. May Allah blast thy life, unnatural woman, thus to tempt thy son to sell his soul, his part in everlasting life, for earthly gain."

Iskender took her in his arms and silenced her; then turned to pacify his mother, who was much incensed. Had she thought for herself at all? Was not all her endeavour to secure prosperity and a high position for Iskender, and, of course, his bride? What right had this chit of a girl, who knew nothing of the world, nor the shifts that folks are forced to who would live in it comfortably, to call her husband's mother an unnatural woman for displaying a little forethought? And Allah knew it was a grievous pity, for her adherence would have clinched the matter. They would have given Iskender anything on earth to secure the conversion of the daughter of the Orthodox priest. Appeased at length, she asked to see the picture. It was a simple fancy of Iskender's, done in leisure moments, of angels fighting devils in mid-air, with clouds like solid cushions spread to fall on.

"Aye, that may pass," she admitted grudgingly, "the fiends at all events, for they believe in them."

In a dream, Iskender, at his mother's side, approached once more the Mission on the sandhills, traversed the garden and the clean cool hall, and entered the reception-room with its soft carpets, polished chairs and tables, which had presented to his childish mind the life of palaces. There sat the ladies with their work-baskets, each in her special chair, exactly as of yore. There was the canary in its cage, and there was the dog in Hilda's lap as usual. The mother of George came forward and shook hands with him, then made him sit beside her and recount his doings. Conscious of independent standing, he was fearless and behaved with dignity; he even asked for news of the Emîr without confusion. The other ladies chatted kindly of his marriage, praising the beauty of the bride, whom they knew only by sight; even the Father of Ice shook hands with him, and hoped with a smile that he was well and thriving. It surprised him much to see his mother making frequent reverence, to hear her asking pardon in his name.

Having inquired for George and the rest of the children, each by name, and assured himself of their welfare, he conceived that he had said enough, and wished to go. It was then that he made his offering, producing the little picture and placing it in the lady's hand with conscious pride. The effect was quite other than he had expected. The ladies Carûlîn and Jane turned from it with a pitying smile; Hilda remarked, "I prefer your earlier work;" the missionary indulged in a curt laugh; while the mother of George herself, the blest recipient, was dumb, till, seeing trouble in Iskender's eyes, she forced a smile and exclaimed:

"A curious picture! I shall certainly preserve it among my treasures."

Outside the house again, his mother punched Iskender in the back and spat at him, calling him fool and marplot, cursing all his ancestry.

"Hast thou no sense, no perspicacity? When all went well, what need to show thy picture? Why bring a picture that had angels in it? I saw them shudder and go yellow at the sight of those white, holy ones. Couldst thou not paint a picture all of devils, or else of things without religious meaning? And what possessed thee to inquire concerning the health of that bad Emîr, who spurned the love of the Sitt Hilda? Thou knewest nothing of the story? Say that again, unblushing liar!—when I myself informed thee on our way up thither. Merciful Allah! So thou heardest nothing; thy wits went wandering off, as always, to thy painting, or the pleasures of thy bride; and, for the lack of a little attention, mere politeness, the hopes of our house lie ruined. Naturally poor Hilda thought thy question was designed to taunt her. I saw how red she went, though thou didst not. But for that she would certainly have praised thy picture. Now she hates thee. Well, no doubt it is from Allah! But none the less it is hard for me to bear, with the wife of Costanîn for ever dinning in my ear her son's achievements. And why, if thou must be a painter, dost thou not go to Beyrût, that great fashionable city, superior to any in Europe, where folks have taste, and thou couldst make a fortune by thy art? Thy bride could help thee in the world of fashion, for her father is well known and has rich friends among the Orthodox. But where is the use in talking to a man like thee? Thou hast no spirit, no ambition."

Iskender did not argue. His mother's note of angry lamentation, in strange accordance with his feelings at that moment, condoned the sharpness of her words, which hardly reached him. The failure of the missionaries to see the merit in his work showed ignorance, but was their own affair; the omission to say "thank you" for his gift was downright rudeness. Their open contempt of his little masterpiece rankled hot in his mind. He vowed before Allah never again to seek to please a Frank and risk such insult. Henceforth he would cleanse his mouth whenever he so much as passed in the street near one of that accursed race.

With pride he called himself a Nazarene, a native Christian of the land, preferring the insolent domination of the Muslim, his

blood-relative, to the arrogance of so-called Christian strangers.

Returning home, he told Nesîbeh of his determination to start next morning early for the Holy City. His bride was glad, for she had feared much from his visit to the missionaries, and longed to remove him far from their hellish wiles.

CHAPTER XXXII

Two years later, when Allah had given him a male child by Nesîbeh, Iskender visited his wife's father in the spring-time. He arrived on foot leading the donkey, on which his wife sat with the baby in her arms. An excited group stood out beneath the ilex-tree. They shouted "Praise to Allah!" The mother of Iskender ran and seized the baby, and rocking it in her arms, poured forth her hoard of tidings. Asad ebn Costantin was married—had Iskender heard?—to a great lady of the English, a virgin strictly guarded, the only child of rich and honoured parents. Ah, the cunning devil! The people there at the Mission were furious, he might believe; the more so that Asad was bringing his bride to visit them as an equal—he, the son of Costantin, who fetched the water! Ah, they were well repaid for their treatment of Iskender; and they knew it!

But Mîtri broke in, crying:

"Hast thou brought the picture?"

"Be sure I have!" replied Iskender cheerfully. Opening one of the saddlebags he produced it, wrapped in a linen cloth, which he removed. A howl of delight went up from all the company.

"Ma sh' Allah! It is Mar Jiryis himself!" "May we be helped through him!" "Now our church will wear a richer and more modish look!" exclaimed one and another.

It was indeed the crowning triumph of his art, which Iskender brought as an offering to the little church of St. George beneath the oak-tree, which he regarded as the fountain of Heaven's favours towards him. For the form and posture of the saint he had gone to one of those grand English newspapers which the Emîr had given to him years ago. He had taken thence the likeness of a mounted officer slashing downward with his sabre, while his charger, dragged back on its haunches, pawed the air convulsively. A uniform of gold embellished this equestrian figure, which was framed in coils of Dragon, green and black; while the Dragon, in its turn, was framed in a fine decorative gush of blood, pure scarlet, which swirled and eddied round the combatants, springing visibly from the monster's many wounds.

"It is a feast for the eyes!" cried Mîtri, when he had gazed his fill. There were tears on his cheeks as he turned and kissed Iskender. "The saint will be pleased, in sh' Allah! To-night it shall honour my house. To-morrow we will carry it in procession seven times round the church before we enter. It is all arranged. Khalîl will be there with his music, which is lawful anywhere except in church. In sh' Allah, we will have a ceremony such as has not been seen in this place for many a year. I have spoken to the caimmacâm and to the learned at the Mosque about it; and they say we may do what we like among ourselves, but must desist if any Muslim passing by should make objection. To-morrow is high festival with us!"

Accordingly, next morning, there was concourse at the house of the Orthodox priest. Within, upon a kind of altar, the picture was displayed with tapers burning. Each new arrival paid respect to it. Abdullah, who had strayed in aimless with the crowd, stood fixed before it as if petrified, in horror of the dragon's hideous face. Then, with a fervent "God protect us all!" the spell was broken and he hurried out.

"A miracle!" cried Mîtri joyously. "Our picture has already scared a sinner."

Some one in the room inquired tremulously whether dragons such as that portrayed were still to be found in the world?

"No, praise be to Allah!" replied Mîtri. All laughed at the simplicity of the questioner, except Elias, who solemnly averred that such existed, that he himself had seen one crunching a poor one-eyed black man in its cruel jaws.

"He has seen a crocodile, perhaps, in Masr," Yuhanna laughingly suggested, with a hand on the shoulder of the visionary. But Elias protested vehemently, swearing by Allah that he knew a crocodile when he saw one. The monster in dispute had been no crocodile, as witness its possession of two wings, like the wings of a bat, only fifty times larger, and a voice which could be heard for many miles. There was one blessing, however, about all such creatures; that they had power only over unbaptized people. This last touch pleased the majority of his audience, causing them to praise Allah, and inclining them to accept the truth of the whole story on religious grounds. Elias was preparing to support it with some cognate marvel, when Mîtri announced that the procession was being formed. At the same moment, a few prelusive notes of the concertina were heard without. The house soon emptied.

Out in the heavy sunlight, hens fled clucking from the sudden tumult, pigeons circled overhead and cooed distractedly, children were driving dogs away with stones and curses. Khalîl, the musician, stood to lead the way, making his concertina speak occasionally

as a protest against further waiting. Iskender was to follow next to him as donor of the honoured picture; then the males of the congregation by twos and threes, many of them carrying lighted tapers; and, last of all, the priest fully robed, bearing the sacred picture at his breast. Groups of white-veiled women, mere spectators, waited in the shadow of the hovels, or beneath the oak-tree.

"Play that tune that thou didst play at our wedding, O Khalil," cried Nesîbeh to the musician, who was chafing for the start.

"Which tune may that be of all tunes, O lady? I played you all I knew on that most blessed day!" Khalil was very grave and ceremonious, this being the greatest hour of all his life. "Is it this?" He broke into "God save the Queen."

"No, no; it goes like this!" Nesîbeh strove to shadow forth the Frankish air. Do what she would, she could not keep from smiling, for pleasure in her husband's great success.

"Ah, yes, I know thy meaning now. That is a tune indeed—a tune of playful triumph without arrogance, well suited to the occasion. It was taught to me by an English mariner in Bûr' Saïd, and is entitled 'Bob gûs the wîssal.'"

"Play it, O Khalil! Play it all the time; for it is merry and it makes us laugh!" cried Nesîbeh, clapping her hands.

"Ready!" cried Mîtri from the house; and Khalil stepped out with triumph, flourishing his concertina, flinging its strains out far and wide; his head, his whole body carried this way and that with the violence of his exertions. Elias and other excitable capers or embraced each other. The more serious rendered praise to Allah; the women looking on gave forth their joy-cries; and Mîtri, bringing up the rear of the procession, smiled a blessing on their enthusiasm over the picture held against his breast. They had compassed the church five times to the tune of "Pop goes the Weasel," and were coming round again when a carriage which they had not heard approaching drew up beneath the ilex-tree. Its occupants were a Frankish clergyman dressed in black, and a lady dressed in white with a white sunshade. They watched the procession curiously with pitying smiles. Iskender from a distance was struck by the clergyman's complexion, which seemed darker than is usual among Europeans; then when he passed the front of the church and got close view of him, he saw that it was Asad son of Costantîn. In a flash he remembered things he had forgotten, recalled a standpoint that had once seemed all desirable. He perceived how ludicrous this joyful marching round must seem to English eyes; and for a moment felt ashamed for himself and his friends. But the next minute, having turned the corner of the church, he met his young wife's smile, and grew once more exultant. The lady in the carriage beside Asad was very ugly, and no longer young. Proudly he followed the musician round again, and, once more abreast of the carriage, returned the contemptuous smile of the son of Costantîn. And then the music ceased, as the procession passed into the darkness of the little church.